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# *The* KINGMAKERS

BURTON E. STEVENSON



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# THE KINGMAKERS

BY

BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Mystery of the Boule Cabinet,"  
"The Gloved Hand," etc.

FRONTISPIECE BY

E. C. CASWELL



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1922

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## **THE KINGMAKERS**



## **PART I.—MONDAY**



# THE KINGMAKERS

## CHAPTER I

### THE COUNTESS RÉMOND

**S**ELDEN, entering from the dining-room, saw that the lounge was crowded, and he paused for a moment to look about him. It was the half-hour between dinner and the Sporting Club, and he was pleasantly aware of the odours of good coffee and super-excellent tobacco, mingled with the delicate and very expensive perfumes rising from the clothes, the hair, the shoulders of the women lying indolently back in the deep chairs.

It was the women who dominated the scene. There were men present, to be sure, but they were as unobtrusive to the eye, as strictly utilitarian, as the donor kneeling humbly in the corner of the picture before the madonna he had paid to have painted.

These men were donors, too, of many things besides paint—but the resemblance ended there. For there was nothing madonna-like about the women. They differed in being blonde or brune, of various contours, and of all ages, but some subtle quality of spirit bound them together in a common sisterhood. Their gowns ran the gamut of the rainbow and were of every material and degree of eccentricity, but a



common purpose underlay them all. Every neck bore its rope of pearls, every hand its clustered diamonds.

Tributes to beauty, one might suppose—but not at all. The treasures of the Rue de la Paix, the choicest creations of Cartier, had been showered upon beauty and ugliness alike—if there was any difference, beauty had the worst of it. Indeed most of these women were anything but beautiful. There were some who were still slim, who still had youth and a certain charm; there were two or three of an incredible seductiveness, more dazzling than the brilliants on their fingers; but for the most part they were fat, raddled, unspeakably vulgar, gazing out at the world from between darkened lashes with eyes unutterably weary and disillusioned.

They were not all courtesans. The trophies so lavishly displayed were, in part at least, the spoils of marriage; but, virtuous or vicious, their worlds moved in the same orbit, with the same purpose, toward the same end.

Was it one of these women, Selden wondered, who had summoned him to a rendezvous? He told himself that he was foolish to have come, that he should have known better, and he had an impulse to pass on without stopping. Yet something about the note which had been handed in to him as he was dressing for dinner had piqued his curiosity, and piqued it still:

If Mr. Selden will be in the lounge at 9:45 this evening, he will not only give one of his debtors an opportunity to express her gratitude, but will learn something that may prove of interest.

The writing was unusually firm and characteristic. He was quite sure that he had never seen it before. And it was not in the least sentimental, but decidedly of the world. It was this which persuaded him to come. It is pleasant to have one's services acknowledged, and he was always willing to be interested. More than once he had been started on a profitable trail in some such unusual fashion. On the other hand, should it prove merely an attempt at intrigue, an advance on the part of some impecunious lady who had secured his name from the chasseur, it would be easy enough to withdraw—he had only to explain the state of his finances! So here he was.

He saw that the divan to the right of the fireplace was unoccupied, threaded his way to it among the chairs and tables and over outstretched feet, and asked the waiter for coffee. He lighted a cigarette and glanced at his watch. It was 9:40.

The fire had a welcome warmth, for he had still in his bones the chill of unheated Austria, from which he had arrived only that morning, and he leaned forward, elbows on knees, and stretched out his hands to it. Indeed it was principally to get warm again that he had come to Monte Carlo.

But the chill was in his heart, too; and he shivered a little at thought of the pinched, blue faces, the hopeless eyes . . .

He was suddenly conscious that some one was standing beside him.

"Mr. Selden?" said a voice.

In an instant he was on his feet, bowing above the hand that was held out to him.

His first impression was of that hand, long, nerv-

ous, but giving the assurance of strength in reserve—just the hand to have produced the writing of the note. His next was of the eyes, extraordinarily vivid under level brows; with iris so distended that they seemed quite black, though he was afterwards to see that they were a dark green shot with yellow.

"How happy I am to see you again!" she said in a clear voice, for the benefit of the idly-observant room, withdrew her hand and sank into a corner of the seat. "Please get me some coffee," she added, "and give me a cigarette."

Her eyes met his, as he held the match for her, and a twinkle of amusement sprang into them.

"Your sister is well, I hope?" she asked. "Let me see—it has been two years, almost, since I last saw her."

"She is quite well, thank you," answered Selden, who by this time had pulled himself together, and was quite ready to accept a hypothetical sister. "She is to be married next month," he added, as a slight contribution to the game.

"How interesting! To an American? But of course. Tell me about it!" And then, as the waiter served the coffee and passed on, she moved closer to him and dropped her voice. "I do not wonder that you are astonished! Confess that I am not in the least what you expected!"

"I never expected to be so fortunate," countered Selden, and permitted himself to appraise her.

There could be no question that she was most unusual—she would be striking anywhere with her coal-black hair, her long pale face, her vivid eyes and lips; striking too in the way she was dressed, without

ornament, in a narrow Lanvin gown of black which seemed to be part of her, to be moulded to her as a snake's skin is moulded. Then, at second glance, Selden saw there was one ornament—a queer stone of greenish-yellow, matching her eyes, catching her gown together across the curve of her breasts. But there were no pearls, no brilliants, not a single ring on her long fingers. Selden wondered if there were also no donor.

She took the coffee that he offered her and leaned back again in her corner. As she sipped it slowly, she looked across at him with level eyes, and Selden realized that she was also appraising him. He had known at once, of course, that he had never seen her before, and her glance seemed to indicate that he was equally unknown to her. A dozen questions sprang to his lips, but he held them back. It was for her to begin. And he was not quite sure of her status. A woman of position, evidently; but as he looked at her he wondered whether the vividness of eyes and lips, the even pallor of the face, owed something—a very tiny something!—to art. If so, it was consummate art, such as one meets nowhere outside of France. As for her age,—but he hesitated even to venture a guess.

"I have wanted to know you for a long time, Mr. Selden," she said softly at last.

"You honour me!"

"The historian of the war, the interpreter of the peace conference, the champion of the League of Nations, the saviour of Central Europe!" she went on.

Selden stiffened a little, on guard against this

irony. There was upon her lips the merest shadow of a smile which might mean anything.

"You seem extraordinarily well informed," he said.

"Oh, I hear people talk, and you would be surprised, I think, to know how often your name is mentioned. I have even read some of your articles. You write rather well."

"Thank you," said Selden. "I am always striving to improve."

"Besides," she added, "you are, in a way, a curiosity."

"Oh, in many ways!" he protested.

"You are the only man I know," she went on, leaning toward him, "who has not lost hope. Every one else sees only shipwreck and disaster, but you do not seem to see that at all."

"No," agreed Selden, "I don't. I see three hundred million people freed of century-old shackles and struggling toward the light."

She was silent a moment—then she glanced around the room.

"You can see that even here?" she asked.

"It is rather difficult," he admitted, following her glance. "But after all, these people are of no importance—they are just wasters, slackers, headed for death. Just the same," he added, and stopped.

She laughed a little at the way he shut his jaws.

"Swear if you wish to!"

"I was thinking of some things I saw in Vienna and southern Poland not long ago."

Again she gave him a long glance, as though wondering whether she could trust him. He was rather

a queer-looking fellow, with a long, smooth-shaven face, weather-beaten and deeply lined, but the steel-grey eyes looked out steadily from under the heavy lashes, and there was something in the set of the jaw that won confidence. It was a powerful jaw, with muscles that bunched up into little ridges on either side.

"Have you been to Goritzza recently?" she asked.

"I was there last month."

"Did you meet the new ruler?" The question was asked indolently, almost carelessly, but there was in the voice a little quiver which struck Selden's ear.

"You mean the president—Jeneski? Yes; he gave me an interview."

"What did you think of him?"

"I thought him a remarkable man," said Selden, looking at her and wondering if it was to ask these questions she had summoned him here.

"But impractical, a dreamer, I have been told," she supplemented.

"Impractical in some ways, perhaps," Selden conceded; "a little of a fanatic, as all reformers must be, to get anything done. But an electrical man—full of fire and energy, discouraged by nothing. He is greatly handicapped by the poverty of the country and the ignorance of the people. They are having a hard time to get along, but at least they have got rid of the mediæval dynasty which kept them in slavery for two hundred years."

"Was it as bad as that?" she asked.

"The old king meant well enough, and had his good moments, but he was an absolute despot. No-

body could question his will—there was nothing to hope for. Now they are free.”

“And happy of course?” she commented, her lip curling a little.

“It is difficult to be happy on an empty stomach. If Jeneski had two or three million dollars . . .”

“But since he has not?”

“Well, they must go to work and earn it, and be glad they have something to work for and look forward to. There are a lot of royalists left, of course,” Selden added, “who lament the good old days, and would like to see Jeneski overthrown. There is the old nobility and all the hangers-on who made money out of the court, and who are now as poor as anybody.”

“So some day, perhaps, there will be a restoration?”

“No, I don’t think so. Restorations are expensive. The royalists haven’t any money, and the old king is quite bankrupt. I admire him for one thing, though.”

“What is that?”

“Jeneski told me they had offered him half a million dollars to renounce the throne, and he refused it—said that no king could renounce his throne, any more than he could renounce his right hand or the colour of his hair—not those words, of course, but that was the idea. Good old mediæval, divine right stuff!”

“I like him for that.”

“So do I, and I’m going to try to see him. He’s staying somewhere along the Riviera, isn’t he?”

“Yes, at Nice.”

"Jeneski spoke also of the former prime minister—a very able man."

"Yes—the Baron Lappo. He is with the king, I believe."

"So Jeneski said. He tried to detach him, but it was no use. Lappo is devoted to the dynasty. And of course they have some plot in hand. Well, if it amuses them," and Selden shrugged his shoulders. "But they would better make haste. In six months it will be too late—Jeneski will have his people with him. Does the king keep up a court over here?"

"I do not know, but I have been told he lives very simply."

"Do you happen to know his grandson, the crown prince Danilo?"

"I have seen him—he is often at the Sporting Club."

"A great gambler, I have heard?"

"It is in the blood," said the girl, with a little shrug. "His father was killed in a duel that followed a night of play."

Selden looked at her again. She seemed well-informed about other things besides himself.

"Have you ever been to Goritza?" he asked.

"I was born there," she answered quietly.

"Born there?" he echoed. "But you—you . . ."

"Well?" she asked, smiling at his astonishment.

"You look like a Parisienne, and you talk like an American!"

"I was taken to America when I was a child, and grew up there," she explained.

He waited for her to go on, to elucidate the atmosphere of Paris, but she seemed lost in thought.



Once he fancied her eyes wandered toward the door, as though she were expecting some one. There was some work he had planned to do that evening—work he really ought to do. Besides, an explanation was undoubtedly due him, and it was time she made it. In spite of himself, he stirred nervously.

"Sit still a moment longer," she laughed, perceiving the movement.

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, I am not offended—I know how restless Americans are. And I know what is in your mind: you have some work to do. It is always so with an American. But I have not yet told you why I wished to see you. In the first place, I desired to thank you for a very great service—the greatest service a man can render a woman."

Was she in earnest, Selden wondered? She certainly seemed so, and he tried to think what the greatest service was a man could render a woman. There were so many services—besides, it depended on the woman—and also on the man.

"If it is a riddle, I give it up," he said. "How could I render you a service? I have never seen you before."

"No—nor I you."

"What was the service?"

"You rid me of a husband I hated."

Selden leaned back in his corner and put the thought of work definitely behind him. He had not expected anything like this.

"That is interesting," he commented. "You mean I—ah—put him out of the way?"

She nodded, her lips quivering.

"Of course," said Selden, "it would be foolish for me to deny that I have a long list of assassinations to my credit. But I do not seem to recall this particular one."

"I think the date will bring it back to your mind."

"What was the date?"

Her face was ashen, and her eyes burned into his. Could it be that she was in earnest?

"The sixth of June, 1918," she said hoarsely.

Selden contracted his brows in an effort to remember where he had been on the sixth of June, 1918. That was two years and a half ago, and so much had happened; the sixth of June—yes, of course—that was a day he would remember all his life. At dawn, he had watched the Marines straighten out their line toward Torcy, and late in the afternoon he had seen them go forward against Belleau Wood and Buresches. He remembered the thrill with which he had learned of the order for the attack—we were going in at last! And he had hurried out of headquarters and clambered up to a little red-roofed farm-house looking down on Belleau . . .

But what connection could all this have with the woman beside him?

And then his face stiffened at a sudden recollection.

"You don't mean," he stammered, "you can't possibly mean that you were the wife . . ."

She nodded, white to the lips. Then suddenly her face changed, the blood rushed back into it, and she was smiling gaily.

Selden, more astonished than ever, looked around to see two men approaching, one old and rather fat,

but with a keen, distinguished face, embellished by a monocle; the other young and slim, thirty at the most, perhaps less than that . . .

"Dear countess!" cried the elder man, in French, and raised her hand and kissed it. "I have been searching for you everywhere. Permit me to present to you Prince Danilo. My prince," he added, turning to the young man, "this is the Countess Rémond, of whom you have heard me so often speak."

## CHAPTER II

### A TRAGIC MEMORY

**A**S the prince bowed, with much empressement, above the slim hand extended to him, Selden was conscious of a rapid but penetrating scrutiny on the part of the older man. It was as if an X-ray had been plunged into the innermost recesses of his being, photographed everything that was to be seen there, and been instantly withdrawn. He had never seen more remarkable eyes—which was perhaps why their owner ambushed one of them behind a glass; nor a more remarkable face, alert, high-nosed, finely coloured, with a mouth at once forceful and good-humoured, and an air that bespoke wide knowledge and deep experience.

"Enchanted to meet you, madame," the prince was murmuring in the most approved fashion. "It is true that the baron has spoken often of you."

"M. le Baron does me too much honour," protested the countess.

"Impossible, madame," countered the baron. "To prove to you how much in earnest I am, I have come all the way from Nice expressly to pay you my respects, having learned only this morning, quite by accident, that you were here. Why did you not inform me?"

"Ah," murmured the countess, "I know how busy you always are!"

"At twelve," he agreed.

"Till to-morrow, then," said the countess, and moved away, the plump but altogether distinguished baron on one side and the tall, rather commonplace prince on the other.

A strange trio, Selden told himself, as he stood for a moment looking after them—at the graceful lines of the woman's figure; at the baron's head, with its grey hair parted down the back after the ancient manner; at the prince's negligent walk and careless air—a little too careless, perhaps, to be quite genuine. And yet perhaps not, for the face was careless too, with its dark skin and shining eyes and sensuous mouth; not a bad face, but rather a weak one, as of a man who no longer found any cause worth fighting for.

They had paused a moment to get some wraps from the vestiaire, and the countess looked back at him and smiled. Then they passed through the door together, and Selden, shaking himself out of his thoughts, betook himself to his room. There he changed into an old dressing-gown and disreputable slippers, got his pipe to going, sat down at his desk and plunged resolutely into the article he was finishing for the *Times*. Long practice had perfected his ability to switch his mind at will from one subject to another, and for the hour that followed he was not at Monte Carlo but at Neustadt in central Austria, witnessing the loading of a long Red Cross train with half-starved children to be taken away into Switzerland to be fed. It was the only way to save them—no one realized that better than their fathers—but there had been scenes. . . . For to

many of the women these pale little wraiths were all that the war had left them.

He leaned back at last with a sigh of satisfaction; then got his manuscript together, looked it over, made a correction here and there, sealed it up, addressed it, summoned the porter and sent it off. That done, he filled his pipe again, stretched out on the chaise-longue and allowed his mind to wander back over the events of the evening.

A strange trio. Each remarkable—especially the baron. To talk with him would be worth while. His point of view was certain to be interesting—and might, after all, be the right one. As for the prince, he seemed to be little more than a puppet in the baron's hands—he had certainly given the impression of being led around—led up to the countess to be introduced, led to the opera. Perhaps that was the price he paid for freedom in other directions—and crown princes were destined to be puppets, more or less! As for the countess, evidently a woman of the world, wise in its ways, refined in its furnace—but also a little hardened. Curious how, when the baron was speaking, she seemed always to be watching for her cue.

Perhaps it was really a drama that was preparing, with these three for the protagonists. And perhaps he too would have a part—a minor one, of course; but to be behind the scenes would be something. That was where he loved to be, behind the scenes, not involved in the action but free to watch the strings that worked the puppets and to try to trace them to their controlling source. It was great luck—too good to be true! He was letting his imagina-

tion run away with him. But how else explain the sudden interest of the Countess Rémond? To suppose that she had summoned him to a rendezvous merely to thank him—that was absurd! She would not waste her time like that. No; there was some other purpose, and the baron and the prince had arrived at a most inopportune moment, for she was just upon the verge of explanation. Or had she been expecting them all the while? Was that why her eyes had sought the door?

And this engagement for to-morrow which she had suddenly evolved? What did that mean?

Well, to-morrow would tell!

But he realized that he had need to be on guard. He recalled her strange face, her burning eyes, her vivid mouth. Who was she? What was she? A woman with a furnace inside her. No novice, certainly. But neither was he a novice! A fierce woman—how her face had hardened when she had mentioned that date—the sixth of June, 1918!

Selden's hardened, too, for he was not likely ever to forget the happenings of that day—one happening in particular.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, in the old farmhouse which had been the home of some quiet peasant family for a hundred years, but which was now the headquarters of General Harbord, commanding the Marine brigade of the Second Division, he had seen an order typed off which marked the beginning of the American offensive. It was an order that at five o'clock the Marines should advance against Belleau Wood and the village of Bouresches. The Marines had taken over their present positions from

the French only a few hours before, and the Germans would count on their waiting to get settled before doing any attacking. Therefore there was every reason to expect the advantage of surprise. In any event, as General Harbord remarked, the way to act in an active sector was to be active.

Copies were made of the order and a minute later two dispatch bearers were pounding away toward the lines to convey them to the regimental commanders. Selden, tingling with excitement, resolved to watch the advance from the very best position discoverable, and for the next hour scouted up and down behind the lines. He found, at last, a place which seemed ideal, a tiny farm-house with red-tiled roof partially blown away, looking down from a little knoll upon both wood and village. He assured himself that the place was deserted and that there was a ladder by which he could reach the roof, then walked over to the little orchard and lay down in the shade to rest.

He must have dozed, for he was roused suddenly by a clatter of explosions. The beginning of the attack, he told himself, and then, as he started to rise, saw a motor-cycle wheel swiftly into the yard beside the house and stop. The rider, whom he recognized as one of the couriers from headquarters, sprang to the ground, and, after a quick look around, entered the house. He was out again in a moment, gathering up some bits of wood and dried grass, which he took back into the house. Then he drew a cupful of gasoline from the tank of his motor-cycle and hurried into the house again.

Selden, watching motionless, told himself bitterly



that he would have to seek another vantage point—evidently this place was going to be used by the army. He would inquire—and he was just rising to his feet when he was astounded to see a thin column of smoke rising from the chimney. The day was windless and the smoke rose straight into the air. Then suddenly it stopped—started again—stopped—started again. Five distinct puffs floated upward toward the sky, then the smoke stopped for good, and a moment later the dispatch rider emerged, flung himself into the saddle and was off.

Selden lay staring after him, trying to understand. It had been a signal, of course, but to whom? To our men? But why use so clumsy a method, when there were telephones everywhere? To the Germans? The thought brought him bounding to his feet, and in another moment he was racing down the hill. But he lost his way in a strip of woods; he ran into a deep ravine, which delayed him; and then into a stretch of bog, around which he had to work his way, and even as he panted up the road toward headquarters, the earth burst asunder with the thunder of the artillery preparation.

General Harbord listened to the gasped-out story with a face of granite, and called his chief of staff.

"Have we time to stop the attack?" he asked.

"Impossible, sir," said the chief. "There is just a minute and a half. We should only disorganize it."

So they sat and waited—through a minute which seemed like an hour—and then the reports came pouring in—of the massed machine-gun fire which had greeted the attack at the very outset, of the

rifles waiting in the woods; oh, yes, our men had gone on, but the casualties were very heavy, especially among the officers—yes, Colonel Catlin too. The Germans had seemed to know the very minute to expect them . . .

There was a brief trial, late that night, and a swift conviction. The accused had denied nothing, admitted nothing—merely shrugging his shoulders as he listened to Selden's story and realized the game was up—asking only that he might write a letter to his wife; and at dawn a firing-squad had ended the affair.

Selden had, of course, not seen the letter, but it shocked him now to think that the woman to whom the man wrote that night was the lovely being who had summoned him to a rendezvous. He had made no inquiries—indeed, had sought to drop the whole sordid incident out of his consciousness. But now he began to wonder who the man really was. How had he managed to win this gorgeous woman? What had he said in the letter?

The censor, of course, would permit him to say little except good-bye; certainly he would not permit him to mention Selden's name, or even to refer to him indirectly. Most probably the letter had never been sent at all—had been simply turned over to the intelligence department. But, in that case, how had she known? In any case, how had she known?

The thought brought him bolt upright. It would have been wiser to keep that strange trio under observation. He had been wrong to yield to the feeling that he was in the way. That the baron had come to Monte Carlo merely to pay his respects and

introduce the prince Selden did not for an instant believe—and what place better than an opera box for a discreet talk? Decidedly he should have gone along!

Perhaps it was not yet too late. He glanced at his watch—yes, eleven forty-five—the opera was over. But there remained *Ciro's* and the Sporting Club . . .

In another instant, he was kicking off his slippers and reaching for his shoes.

## CHAPTER III

### A DUO AT THE OPERA

THE opera at Monte Carlo is housed in the end of the Casino building nearest the Hotel de Paris, so that the Countess Rémond and her two companions had only to cross the street. It was to the private entrance that the baron led the way. Here the prince paused.

"Do you require me any longer?" he asked.

"Perhaps you would better go in and be seen with us for a moment," said the baron.

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## CHAPTER III

### A DUO AT THE OPERA

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"So it remained for me to learn it I know not how—a voice on the Promenade des Anglais, a bit of gossip at the casino, a line in the *Petit Niçois*,—'The Countess Rémond is at the Hotel de Paris.' At least, I lost no time. I had my man confirm it over the telephone; unhappily you were out, so I could make no engagement. But I came just the same, and brought the prince with me, hoping to be so fortunate as to find you free for the evening."

"What is it you propose?" asked the countess, who had listened to all this laughingly, yet with a certain curious intentness, as though seeking to find in it somewhere a code, a key, a hidden meaning.

"I was going to propose the opera—'Tosca'—you have, of course, heard it many times; but there is a new tenor, an American. Afterwards the club, *Ciro's*—what you wish. But if you are engaged," and his eyes rested fleetingly upon Selden.

"This is M. Selden," said the countess; "an old friend of mine in America, whom I found sitting here a moment ago, quite by accident. M. Selden, this is Prince Danilo of Goritza, and the Baron Lappo, counsellor of kings, and also an old friend of mine."

"Counsellor of one king, only, monsieur," corrected the baron; "I find it enough."

"You have heard of M. Selden," added the countess; "you, at least, baron, who read everything. It was he who wrote those articles in the *London Times* about our new republic. They must have annoyed you deeply!"

"Ah, they did!" agreed the baron, smiling. "I liked the ones on Austria much better—you must

permit me, monsieur, to congratulate you on a splendid piece of work. There we see eye to eye. And let me add that I am happy indeed to meet you. You will perhaps give me an opportunity to expose my point of view."

"It is exactly what I hoped, M. le Baron," said Selden. "I was saying to madame but a moment since that I must try to see the king."

"Yes, that can be arranged. He will welcome the opportunity. I will let you know." The baron paused a moment and looked him over with a quizzical smile. "You are a great republican, hein?" he asked. "I also, in theory, though perhaps you will not believe it. It is true—but not for my country; no, there I am a monarchist. I do not believe our people are ready for a republic. In another generation, perhaps, but not now. They require education—but we will talk of all that some other time. Perhaps you would care to hear 'La Tosca' once again? I have a box—I should be most happy."

"Thank you," said Selden; "but I have some work to do. Even at Monte Carlo I try to do a little."

"Ah, you Americans!" murmured the baron. "It is no wonder you own the world! I will speak to the king to-morrow. You shall hear from me. You are staying at this hotel?"

"Yes, M. le Baron. And thank you."

"Au revoir," said the countess, and held out her hand. "I am so glad to have seen you again, and I shall not forget our engagement for to-morrow. At twelve, shall we say?"

Selden was quick to bow assent.



"At twelve," he agreed.

"Till to-morrow, then," said the countess, and moved away, the plump but altogether distinguished baron on one side and the tall, rather commonplace prince on the other.

A strange trio, Selden told himself, as he stood for a moment looking after them—at the graceful lines of the woman's figure; at the baron's head, with its grey hair parted down the back after the ancient manner; at the prince's negligent walk and careless air—a little too careless, perhaps, to be quite genuine. And yet perhaps not, for the face was careless too, with its dark skin and shining eyes and sensuous mouth; not a bad face, but rather a weak one, as of a man who no longer found any cause worth fighting for.

They had paused a moment to get some wraps from the vestiaire, and the countess looked back at him and smiled. Then they passed through the door together, and Selden, shaking himself out of his thoughts, betook himself to his room. There he changed into an old dressing-gown and disreputable slippers, got his pipe to going, sat down at his desk and plunged resolutely into the article he was finishing for the *Times*. Long practice had perfected his ability to switch his mind at will from one subject to another, and for the hour that followed he was not at Monte Carlo but at Neustadt in central Austria, witnessing the loading of a long Red Cross train with half-starved children to be taken away into Switzerland to be fed. It was the only way to save them—no one realized that better than their mothers—but there had been scenes. . . . For to

many of the women these pale little wraiths were all that the war had left them.

He leaned back at last with a sigh of satisfaction; then got his manuscript together, looked it over, made a correction here and there, sealed it up, addressed it, summoned the porter and sent it off. That done, he filled his pipe again, stretched out on the chaise-longue and allowed his mind to wander back over the events of the evening.

A strange trio. Each remarkable—especially the baron. To talk with him would be worth while. His point of view was certain to be interesting—and might, after all, be the right one. As for the prince, he seemed to be little more than a puppet in the baron's hands—he had certainly given the impression of being led around—led up to the countess to be introduced, led to the opera. Perhaps that was the price he paid for freedom in other directions—and crown princes were destined to be puppets, more or less! As for the countess, evidently a woman of the world, wise in its ways, refined in its furnace—but also a little hardened. Curious how, when the baron was speaking, she seemed always to be watching for her cue.

Perhaps it was really a drama that was preparing, with these three for the protagonists. And perhaps he too would have a part—a minor one, of course; but to be behind the scenes would be something. That was where he loved to be, behind the scenes, not involved in the action but free to watch the strings that worked the puppets and to try to trace them to their controlling source. It was great luck—too good to be true! He was letting his imagina-

tion run away with him. But how else explain the sudden interest of the Countess Rémond? To suppose that she had summoned him to a rendezvous merely to thank him—that was absurd! She would not waste her time like that. No; there was some other purpose, and the baron and the prince had arrived at a most inopportune moment, for she was just upon the verge of explanation. Or had she been expecting them all the while? Was that why her eyes had sought the door?

And this engagement for to-morrow which she had suddenly evolved? What did that mean?

Well, to-morrow would tell!

But he realized that he had need to be on guard. He recalled her strange face, her burning eyes, her vivid mouth. Who was she? What was she? A woman with a furnace inside her. No novice, certainly. But neither was he a novice! A fierce woman—how her face had hardened when she had mentioned that date—the sixth of June, 1918!

Selden's hardened, too, for he was not likely ever to forget the happenings of that day—one happening in particular.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, in the old farmhouse which had been the home of some quiet peasant family for a hundred years, but which was now the headquarters of General Harbord, commanding the Marine brigade of the Second Division, he had seen an order typed off which marked the beginning of the American offensive. It was an order that at five o'clock the Marines should advance against Belleau Wood and the village of Bouresches. The Marines had taken over their present positions from

the French only a few hours before, and the Germans would count on their waiting to get settled before doing any attacking. Therefore there was every reason to expect the advantage of surprise. In any event, as General Harbord remarked, the way to act in an active sector was to be active.

Copies were made of the order and a minute later two dispatch bearers were pounding away toward the lines to convey them to the regimental commanders. Selden, tingling with excitement, resolved to watch the advance from the very best position discoverable, and for the next hour scouted up and down behind the lines. He found, at last, a place which seemed ideal, a tiny farm-house with red-tiled roof partially blown away, looking down from a little knoll upon both wood and village. He assured himself that the place was deserted and that there was a ladder by which he could reach the roof, then walked over to the little orchard and lay down in the shade to rest.

He must have dozed, for he was roused suddenly by a clatter of explosions. The beginning of the attack, he told himself, and then, as he started to rise, saw a motor-cycle wheel swiftly into the yard beside the house and stop. The rider, whom he recognized as one of the couriers from headquarters, sprang to the ground, and, after a quick look around, entered the house. He was out again in a moment, gathering up some bits of wood and dried grass, which he took back into the house. Then he drew a cupful of gasoline from the tank of his motor-cycle and hurried into the house again.

Selden, watching motionless, told himself bitterly

that he would have to seek another vantage point—evidently this place was going to be used by the army. He would inquire—and he was just rising to his feet when he was astounded to see a thin column of smoke rising from the chimney. The day was windless and the smoke rose straight into the air. Then suddenly it stopped—started again—stopped—started again. Five distinct puffs floated upward toward the sky, then the smoke stopped for good, and a moment later the dispatch rider emerged, flung himself into the saddle and was off.

Selden lay staring after him, trying to understand. It had been a signal, of course, but to whom? To our men? But why use so clumsy a method, when there were telephones everywhere? To the Germans? The thought brought him bounding to his feet, and in another moment he was racing down the hill. But he lost his way in a strip of woods; he ran into a deep ravine, which delayed him; and then into a stretch of bog, around which he had to work his way, and even as he panted up the road toward headquarters, the earth burst asunder with the thunder of the artillery preparation.

General Harbord listened to the gasped-out story with a face of granite, and called his chief of staff.

"Have we time to stop the attack?" he asked.

"Impossible, sir," said the chief. "There is just a minute and a half. We should only disorganize it."

So they sat and waited—through a minute which seemed like an hour—and then the reports came pouring in—of the massed machine-gun fire which had greeted the attack at the very outset, of the

rifles waiting in the woods; oh, yes, our men had gone on, but the casualties were very heavy, especially among the officers—yes, Colonel Catlin too. The Germans had seemed to know the very minute to expect them . . .

There was a brief trial, late that night, and a swift conviction. The accused had denied nothing, admitted nothing—merely shrugging his shoulders as he listened to Selden's story and realized the game was up—asking only that he might write a letter to his wife; and at dawn a firing-squad had ended the affair.

Selden had, of course, not seen the letter, but it shocked him now to think that the woman to whom the man wrote that night was the lovely being who had summoned him to a rendezvous. He had made no inquiries—indeed, had sought to drop the whole sordid incident out of his consciousness. But now he began to wonder who the man really was. How had he managed to win this gorgeous woman? What had he said in the letter?

The censor, of course, would permit him to say little except good-bye; certainly he would not permit him to mention Selden's name, or even to refer to him indirectly. Most probably the letter had never been sent at all—had been simply turned over to the intelligence department. But, in that case, how had she known? In any case, how had she known?

The thought brought him bolt upright. It would have been wiser to keep that strange trio under observation. He had been wrong to yield to the feeling that he was in the way. That the baron had come to Monte Carlo merely to pay his respects and

introduce the prince Selden did not for an instant believe—and what place better than an opera box for a discreet talk? Decidedly he should have gone along!

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gilded canopy, being reserved for Monaco's Prince. It was into one of the others that the baron's party was shown; and the baron, after assisting the countess to a seat, himself sat down and looked out across the audience toward the stage. The prince refused the chair proffered by the attendant, and stood leaning against the side of the box as though poised for flight.

The play had proceeded to the second act, and Scarpia was explaining his evil designs to Tosca, while her lover was being melodiously tortured off-stage. The baron looked only long enough to see that Della Rizza was singing Tosca and Dinah-Gilly Scarpia, and then, having heard them many times, he turned his attention from the stage to the audience.

This audience, with the reputation of being the most blasé in the world, was lolling in its seats, listening perfunctorily to the music, and almost visibly digesting a too-generous dinner. Not until Scarpia had died, with a last convulsion, and Tosca had placed the candles on either side of his head, and the curtain had come down and the lights gone up, did it stir. Then it rose to its feet as by a common impulse and surged forth into the pillared atrium to walk up and down and get a little gentle exercise and look itself over.

But the baron did not rise. Instead he drew his chair further back into the recesses of the box.

"Go, my prince," he said, "and take a look at the ladies. Only, I pray you, do not enter the rooms. I have an affair of importance to discuss with our dear countess."

The prince disappeared in an instant and the baron leaned back with a sigh.

"If he were only more serious," he said; "but he resembles that great-great-uncle for whom he was named—intelligent, generous, but entirely mad when it comes to women and games of chance."

"His father was also a little like that, was he not?" asked the countess, with a smile.

"Yes—it is true," and the baron sighed again; "but he was also more earnest, more interested in affairs of state. It was a great blow to the king when he was killed—suddenly—like that—his eldest son. He knew nothing about it until they came bringing the body. Now all his hopes are centred in this boy, who causes us so many anxieties."

"He is still young," the countess pointed out; "and he is at least discreet—one hears nothing of his love affairs."

"Ah, there at least we have been fortunate," said the baron. "For some years now there has been only one. It has grown more serious than I like, yet it is far better than the ruinous affairs in which he might have been involved. But to the gambling there is no end as long as he can find a sou in his pocket. He has a sort of vertigo when he sees the tables, with the wheels going round and the banknotes falling here and there and the croupiers calling the numbers—a vertigo, that is how he describes it. Fortunately at present he has no money and I know no one of whom he can borrow. His debts, I think, have reached the limit. There is perhaps some comfort in that!" he added grimly.

During this discourse, as before that evening, the

countess listened as though waiting for a cue and finding none.

"Why did you send for me?" she asked abruptly.

"Because I have need of you."

"Of course—but in what way?"

"We are preparing to place the king back on his throne."

She shrugged sceptically.

"And I take it for granted," went on the baron, with a sudden unveiling of his eyes, "that you would not be sorry to see Jeneski punished—his work undone, his dream broken."

Her face was livid as she returned his look.

"Yes," she said thickly, "I should be glad of that."

"I thought so," said the baron, and polished his glass abstractedly.

"But it is impossible."

"It is not impossible—it is all but arranged. One little impulse more and it is done. You will supply that impulse."

"I warn you," said the countess, "that I shall have to know everything before I consent."

"You shall know everything," agreed the baron; "and furthermore I can promise you, if we succeed, not only—shall we say satisfaction?—but a material reward—a substantial one."

"We can speak of that later," said the countess, "after I have consented. But why do you come to me? What is it I can do?"

"I come to you," replied the baron, "in the first place because you are a clever woman, and in the second place because you have lived in America for

a long time, and I suppose you understand that people. As for me, I confess I never do."

"You mean the women?"

"But naturally. The men—they are not difficult to understand. Though I sometimes wonder if they can really be as simple as they appear."

"They are," said the countess. "Children. Bad ones, sometimes, but still children, good at heart."

"They seem so to me," agreed the baron.

"Then it is not this M. Selden?"

"No—though he is important also. Unfortunately at this moment it is the question of a woman—two women—perhaps even three women! It is a difficult matter—very difficult; but there is one thing that simplifies it—one of these women is very ambitious and very ignorant."

"That goes without saying," commented the countess, "if she is a rich American. But if you will cease speaking in riddles . . ."

The baron laughed.

"Here is the history," he said; "it is a peculiar one, such as could happen nowhere but in America. This woman, when she was quite young, worked as a waitress in a public restaurant at a place in the western part of the United States called Denver. She met there one day a young man who was a miner, married him and went back with him into the mountains to search for gold. That was admirable, was it not? They kept searching for a long time, and they did not find any gold, but at last they found copper—a mountain of it. My informant tells me that this is not an exaggeration—that it was really a mountain, though it is there no longer.

"This young man had no money, and to develop a mine of copper, even when you have it all together in one mountain, takes a great deal. For a long time nobody believed his story about this mountain, but at last he secured enough money from some men in Denver to build a little mill. But it was not profitable, partly because it was far from the market and the railroad would not extend itself for such a small mill, but principally because it was necessary to pay so high wages to the men who worked the mill. It was very hard to get any men at all, and they could charge what they pleased. So the mill had to be closed, and it looked as though the man had failed—that he would have to sell his mountain for a very small sum. The years were passing; neither the man nor the woman were as young as they had been—especially the woman. She had had two children. She was discouraged. She wanted him to sell. But he would not.

"Now regard how strange are the ways of providence. One day a young man came to him and said, 'I hear you cannot work your mill because labour is so dear.'

" 'That is so,' said the other.

" 'Then I have a proposal to make. I have some friends in the country from which I come, strong, active young men like myself, who wish to come to America, but who have no money. If you will bring them to America, they will work for you for two years and you will give them but to eat and sleep. After that, we will arrange a fair wage.'

"Eh bien, the man raised money enough to bring to America twenty of these young men, and they

went to work for him. They worked well, and soon twenty more were brought over, and then fifty more, and then a hundred more. At the end of five years, a little city had grown up at the foot of that mountain of copper, and the man who had made the proposal to bring over the first ones governed it. And all the men in that city came from my country."

The baron paused for a moment to enjoy the start of surprise which the countess could not wholly repress.

"So it is that story you are telling me!" she said.

"Shall I go on?"

She nodded and settled a little farther back into the shadow.

"The people were well treated," continued the baron. "They lived better than they had ever lived; they saved money and sent it home that their families might join them. But beyond everything, they piled up a great, an enormous fortune for the man who had discovered the mountain. And his wife soon forgot that she had at one time worked in a restaurant."

"Ah, yes," murmured the countess, with a strange smile; "and her children never knew it!"

"Perhaps so," agreed the baron, searching her face with his keen eyes. "I do not know. But at last we began to suspect that we had been wrong to permit so many of our young men to go to America to work for this man of copper, though we had been glad enough at the time, since we had no work for them at home. But they were always writing back about America, about how well things were there—about liberty! Some of them came back from time

to time and talked too much and too wildly. The climax which we should have foreseen came at last. A bomb was thrown at the king."

The baron paused as though to contemplate—to say a prayer before—an act so terrible, so sacrilegious.

"Continue, my friend," encouraged the countess. "I find this history immensely entertaining."

"No doubt you already know most of it," suggested the baron.

"Even if I do, it gains new interest from your manner of telling. Please go on."

"As for the rest, I will be brief. We found that that bomb had been thrown by a man who had come back from America expressly for that purpose. He said so, quite frankly. He told us that another would succeed where he had failed—that our country was to be made a republic like America. We laughed and hanged him—but it gave us to think. So we sent agents to America. They unearthed for us the history which I have just recounted, and they found it was indeed true that over there they were plotting against us. Their leader—the man who ruled them, who organized them, who collected their money, who furnished all the brains—was a radical, an anarchist, who, fifteen years before, had been forced to flee from Goritza for his life."

"And who is now the president of the new republic," broke in the countess. "In a word, Jeneski."

"It is true; the world sometimes seems to me to be upside down," and the baron rubbed a puzzled hand over his head. "I do not yet know how it happened—but in those last days of the war, when

everything was falling to pieces, but when we thought ourselves firmly re-established, he suddenly appeared, won over what was left of the army, and in an hour we were fleeing for the frontier."

"With the crown jewels and the contents of the treasury," said the countess.

The baron smiled a deprecatory smile.

"The treasury was all but empty, and as for the jewels, they belonged to the king. Besides, their value has been much exaggerated. Most unfortunately. If they had been worth more, my task would be an easier one."

The countess smiled. It was impossible to be annoyed with the baron.

"Please finish the story," she said.

The audience was beginning to filter back into its seats for the last act.

"There is but a word more. As I said just now, I am going to place the king back on his throne."

"Then the jewels are not all sold?"

"Alas—long since!"

"Well?"

The baron's eyes were burning as he leaned forward toward her.

"Well—do you know what I propose? The most ironic coup in history! I propose to use for our king the millions heaped up for that king of copper by the very men who are now ruling in our stead. Superb, is it not?"

She was staring at him, striving to understand.

But before she could speak, the lights went out, there came a sharp rap from the conductor, and the orchestra began.



## CHAPTER IV

### ALLIANCE

**T**HIS time it was the baron who attended and the countess who was distraught. The story he had told her had awakened memories and emotions deeper, more violent, than he suspected, and though she managed to keep her face serene, she was on fire within. Whereas the baron, assured that he was making progress, could abandon himself to a new sensation, the pleasure of hearing "E lucevan le stelle" incomparably sung by a voice as smooth, as soft, as iridescent as the satin in old Flemish paintings. For John McCormack was making his début as Mario that evening, and it was not until this moment that he found himself.

And the audience sat spell-bound and listened.

There was no resisting the wild applause, which refused to be silenced. Perhaps the singer, after the shortcomings of the earlier acts, welcomed the opportunity to show what he could do. At any rate, he nodded to M. Lauweryns, who was waiting expectantly with raised baton.

"It is not possible for him to sing it again like that!" cried an excited woman's voice; but he did, perhaps even a shade more perfectly.

"Come, let us go," said the baron, when it was over. "Let us keep that voice fresh in our ears. It

is a pity he is so uncouth," he added, as he laid the countess's wrap about her shoulders. "It must annoy him very much. Now let us look for that scapegrace of mine."

They descended together to the atrium, but the prince was not among the people loitering there. The public gaming rooms beyond were jammed with the usual sordid crowd—shabby old men and women to whom the tables were the breath of life, who spent week after week, month after month, watching the wheel and recording every play, in the hope of discovering a system; cheap adventurers, striving to pick up a few francs; half-starved shop-girls, risking their last little notes with trembling hands; harpies of the underworld, trying to attach themselves to any man who seemed to be winning; all the ugly, tattered, repulsive fringes of society . . .

"He would not be here," said the baron, and hastened through the tainted atmosphere to the private rooms beyond.

But neither was the prince there, and after a vain look around, the baron had a word with the chief inspector.

"M. le Prince was here," said the inspector, "but only for a moment. He met some one he knew—a young man, a newcomer, an American apparently, not yet known to the attendants. They went away together—perhaps to the Sporting Club."

"Thank you; we shall see," said the baron.

As he turned away, the countess, who had listened to all this with the utmost indifference, suppressed a slight yawn.

"If you will see me to my hotel," she suggested.

The baron came back with a start to the obligations of the moment.

"You see how it is!" he protested. "I am no longer myself. These affairs grow too much for me—it is a sign that I am getting old. You will forgive me, will you not?"

"But, yes—run along and search for your prince."

"Confound the prince," said the baron. "Let us go to Ciro's—I am sure you are thirsty. Besides, I have still much to say to you."

The countess hesitated. It would not do to be too docile to this Lappo—a little discipline might strengthen her position.

"Prove that you forgive me," he urged.

"Very well," she agreed. After all, she wanted to hear what he had still to tell her.

"Alors," he went on, half to himself, as they moved together back through the rooms, "the worst that he can do is to borrow some money from this new friend. One debt more—that is nothing; there are already so many!"

The countess looked at him with a little smile.

"Why do you do it?" she asked.

"Do what?"

"Annoy yourself in this way. If your country chooses to be a republic, why not go and amuse yourself somewhere else? Paris is much livelier than Goritza."

"It is in my blood," said the baron, with a shrug of helplessness. "My great-grandfather placed the first Ghita on the throne and established the kingdom; my grandfather enlarged it; my father consolidated it. It was left for me to see it fall to

pieces, in company with so many others. I cannot go away and leave it; something inside me, something stronger than myself, compels me to labour, to expend myself, to set it up again. It is a duty I cannot escape."

"A curse, rather!" corrected the countess.

"Perhaps so. Yes, perhaps it is a curse. Yet I have had my moments," and he fell silent, smiling at recollection of some of them.

The attendants saluted respectfully as they passed through the doors and down the steps, out into the night. To the right, *Ciro's* great electric sign flamed high against the sky, dimming the stars. The countess glanced at it with a shiver of repulsion at thought of the crowded restaurant.

"Let us not go to *Ciro's*," she said, impulsively. "I prefer the terrace."

"Certainly," assented the baron. "We shall be taken for lovers. If I were ten years younger . . ."

"Do not be silly."

"You will be warm enough?"

"Oh, yes," she said, and together they turned to the left, around the end of the building, and down the steps to the terrace which overlooks the sea. They found a seat just back of the balustrade, and sat for a moment without speaking, looking out into the night, warm, jewelled, scented like a woman.

To the right glowed the green and red beacons marking the harbour entrance, and above them a string of lights mounted along the road to the summit of the rock where the Prince of Monaco has his palace and his great museum. In front of them

stretched the Mediterranean, faintly phosphorescent, breaking into white here and there, and lapping rhythmically against the rocky beach. To the left, another row of lights marked the road along the shore, stretching far out into the water along the western edge of Cap Martin.

The beauty, the silence, the repose, fell like a balm upon the baron's troubled spirit. He exhaled slowly from his lungs the fetid air of the casino, and took a long breath of the perfumed night. Some of his years fell from him—his memory, at least, turned back to another night, long ago, when he had sat, with the only woman he had ever loved beside him, on the terrace at Montreaux, looking out across Lake Lemman. Love and the baron—one could smile, now, to find those words together; but there had been a time . . .

And perhaps Vera, Countess Rémond, also had her momentary vision; but she was younger and so less sentimental than the baron—she, also, had her pressing problems!—and it was she who broke the spell.

"You were saying you needed my help," she said. "Is it to bewitch this American copper king into giving you his money? In that case, I warn you that I shall try first to get it for myself!"

The baron, who had come back to the present with a start, looked about him to make sure they could not be overheard; but the terrace was deserted save for a few other couples snuggled together on the benches and a blue-coated gardien pacing solemnly up and down.

"No," he said; "it is not that at all. This king,

like all kings, was mortal. You had not heard?"

"I have heard nothing."

"He has been dead nearly a year."

"Ah," said the countess, understanding suddenly; "it is the widow."

"Yes—a terrifying woman."

The countess smiled at his tone.

"Is it she who is ambitious?"

"Immeasurably!"

"So you are going to marry her to the king!"

"No," said the baron, rubbing his ear thoughtfully. "I had considered that—the lady would not be difficult; but the king rebelled. He pointed out that he had married once for the good of his kingdom, and that once was all that could be demanded of any man. Besides, that would be a little too—a little too—well, not exactly in the best taste. And finally, the Ghitas have a law that never shall the head of the house marry a widow. Of course, in an affair of this importance, these fine-drawn questions of taste might be disregarded, and the king could always abrogate the law. But he is inexorable—not even to regain his throne will he marry a middle-aged American widow."

"No doubt he fears to appear ridiculous," suggested the countess.

"Oh, the good Pietro never cared much about appearances," said the baron. "What he fears is to lose his freedom. I do not blame him," he added impartially.

"Well, then," asked the countess, "what is it you propose?"

"There is the prince," said the baron.

"But surely you do not suppose that he will marry a middle-aged American widow!"

"Oh, no," said the baron; "he will marry the daughter."

He was gazing out across the water and so did not see the sudden wave of colour which flooded the woman's face, and then receded, leaving it deadly white. She sat very still, as though holding herself with iron bands, and turned her head away, and took a slow, deep, tremulous breath. Then she touched her handkerchief to her lips, and when she took it away, there was a tiny stain of blood upon it.

"Will she consent?" she asked in a muffled voice.

"I am not sure," said the baron; "it is there I am baffled. It is there I count upon you."

"Yes—go on."

"Her mother does all she can to persuade her, but unfortunately it seems that in America girls are permitted to choose for themselves."

"Yes," said the countess, a little breathlessly; "what does she say?"

"She says very little; she sits and listens, looking very far away. She is an unusual girl; she could be charming if she wished. For some reason, she does not wish. It is strange in one so young. Also she has brains—perhaps her father's; certainly not her mother's."

"The alliance has been proposed to her then?"

"Yes; it is arranged. It waits only upon her consent. And she hesitates. It is very strange. There seem to be two forces at work in her, one urging her on, one holding her back. It is not ambition that urges her on, I am sure of that; and it is not love—

the prince leaves her indifferent. But whatever it is, I feel that it will win—unless something happens.”

“What can happen?” asked the countess.

“Ah, madame,” sighed the baron, “it is a situation of infinite delicatessen. The scales are so nicely balanced that a breath will sway them. If I could only comprehend the psychology of the American young woman. Does she know more than she should, or less than she should? What really goes on inside her head? I confess I sometimes grow confused talking to this one! Then there is the prince,” added the baron, sighing again. “He is already married.”

“I have heard so,” nodded the countess.

“Morganatically—which is, of course, no marriage at all, and much better than indiscriminate affairs. It is, as I have explained to the mother, like marrying a man who has been divorced. Americans do not object to that. But what I fear—what must not take place—is a scene, an encounter. That would ruin everything.”

“She is here, then?”

“She is at the Hotel de Paris. She goes by the name of Madame Ghita.”

“The prince sees her?”

“But of course. He has been extraordinarily faithful. That is what I meant when I said that his affair had become too serious. But I can manage that—he will not dare disobey his grandfather.”

“Well,” asked the countess a little impatiently, “what is it you want me to do?”

“Two things,” said the baron. “You will permit me to introduce you to Madame Davis and her



daughter. You are the sort of friend they need to instruct them in *savoir faire*, to make of them, so far as it is possible, women of the world. You will show them the absurdity of the provincial point of view."

"Yes; and the other?"

"To speak to this woman whom the prince married in Paris; to gain her confidence, if you can; to convince her that her interest lies in keeping quiet—that otherwise the prince will be a pauper unable to give her a sou. I will empower you to make her a definite offer—a most generous one."

"I should think you could do that more effectively yourself," said the countess.

"I have tried," said the baron, sadly; "but to me she will not listen. She speaks of such a thing as love."

"Women do, sometimes!" commented the countess.

"And I am disarmed," added the baron, "because I admire her; because my heart speaks for her. She is a remarkable woman—much too clever for the prince. But you will see."

"You have said no word of M. Selden," the countess pointed out. "Why did you send me such elaborate instructions with regard to him—even some of his articles to read?"

The baron laughed softly.

"If I may say so," he answered, "I am something of an artist. I like my pictures to be complete and harmonious. We must consider how the world, and especially England, will receive the announcement of this marriage, for its object will be at once plain to

every one. Selden is a man of great influence; his articles are read everywhere. I have sometimes even fancied that he is responsible for the reluctance which Mlle. Davis shows."

"In what way?"

"It seems that she has read his glowing account of our new republic. We have discussed it together, and I have pointed out his errors; but she is not convinced. If he could be brought to our point of view, and would tell her so, I am certain the affair would be settled. Moreover, an article or two in the proper vein would do much to influence public opinion."

"He does not seem easily impressed," said the countess, reflectively.

"I do not expect you to impress him," explained the baron hastily. "It would be folly to think of approaching him in that way. But I hope to prove to him that the king, with millions in his hands, can do much more for our country than Jeneski. And it is true—what we propose is for the country's good. I am certain I can make him see it."

"But my part?"

"Will be to keep him amused. Impress him, if you can—but be very careful. Above all, talk to him and find out what he is thinking."

The countess gazed unseeingly out across the water; at last the baron's intentions lay clear before her.

"Well?" he asked.

"My dear baron," said the countess, "I have not forgotten all I owe to you . . ."

"Ah, when one begins in that tone!" interjected the baron, with a gesture of disappointment.

"But wait. I am not refusing. I am only asking myself whether I can really be of service. If I can, you may rely upon me. As you know, I have my own reasons."

A little convulsion ran across her face. The baron was looking at her keenly.

"Yes?"

"First I must meet these Americans and this Madame Ghita. After that we shall see!"

The baron took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"You have given me an enchanted hour, my dear," he said, "but . . ."

"I understand," she laughed. "One hour is all you can allow yourself!"

"It is true," he assented dismally.

The countess rose.

"Take me to my hotel," she said; "then you can go search for your scapegrace!"

## CHAPTER V

### MADAME GHITA

**T**HE Sporting Club at Monte Carlo is a creation of recent years, an effort on the part of M. Blanc and his associates to meet the demand for a place where one can gamble longer and higher and more variously than is possible at the casino. So here the wheels revolve and the cards fall until four in the morning, instead of stopping at midnight, and to roulette and trente-et-quarante is added baccara, with the sky as the only limit.

It is supposed to be more select, this club, and the proviso is made of requiring an introduction; but introducers can be picked up any morning on the terrace, or the management of any of the hotels will supply them if requested; so that any one of fairly presentable appearance and willing to pay a hundred and fifty francs for the privilege, may gamble there as long as his money lasts.

The club is housed in a beautiful building of white stone just around the corner from the Hotel de Paris, so Selden had only a few steps to go. His card and the payment of the fee admitted him, for he had been "introduced" the year before, and in a moment the electric lift had carried him noiselessly to the gaming-room de luxe which occupies the length of the upper story.

It was filled with a crowd of which at least two-thirds were women—the same sort of women he had seen earlier in the hotel lounge—and the air was stale and heavy with perfume and tobacco. It was a strangely silent crowd, sitting or standing with eyes intent upon the tables, the only sounds being those incident to the game: the voices of the croupiers inviting their patrons to place their bets, the quick whirl of the ivory ball about the rim of the roulette wheel, the warning that no more bets could be placed, the rattle of the ball falling into a compartment, the announcement of the winning number, and the clatter of the little rakes pulling in the bank's winnings. It is less picturesque and exciting than in the days before the war, for then the wagers were made in gold, and there was the clink of coins and the gleam of yellow metal which men have always found so fascinating; but now gold circulates no more in Europe, and wagers are made with disks of coloured celluloid, purchased from the croupiers with the paper notes which have been pouring so freely from the printing-presses. And if one wins, it is with this same flimsy paper that one is paid. A fool's game, truly!

Selden threaded his way among the groups, looking for the countess and her companions, but he succeeded in discovering only the prince. He was seated at the end of a table next to the croupier, and at the moment Selden caught sight of him he was drawing toward himself a pile of notes which the croupier in charge of the bank had just counted out and pushed toward him. He seemed to be well known—or perhaps one of the attachés had noised

his identity about as an advertisement—and a curious crowd was watching his proceedings.

Selden assured himself that neither the countess nor Lappo was in the rooms, then he returned to watch, too, for he was curious to learn something of the prince's personality. One glance at his face was enough to show that gambling was indeed, as the countess had said, in his blood. He was the true type. Utterly oblivious of the crowd about him, his dark skin aglow with inward fire, but entirely calm and collected—cold as ice, indeed!—he was playing without hesitation or timidity, relying apparently upon some inward guidance which he trusted implicitly and upon which he was ready to wager his last franc. With a run of luck, a gambler of this type sometimes wins enormously; but, on the other hand, when luck is bad it requires not many turns of the wheel to take away all he has. And the wheel turns very rapidly!

At this moment, the prince was having a run of luck, and the crowd was watching to see how far it would take him, while a few were trying to follow his plays and get the advantage of his luck while it lasted. He was playing the number twenty-seven, with maximums not only *en plein*, but also on the *cheveaux*, the *carrés* and the *transversales*—a total of about six thousand francs—and twenty-seven had issued three times in the last fifteen plays. In other words, in fifteen plays the prince had lost seventy thousand francs and won two hundred thousand. And as Selden watched, twenty-seven came again and another sixty thousand was added to the prince's winnings.

A murmur of excitement ran through the watching group, for the chef de partie had rung a little bell and had sent the attendant who answered it to the cashier for more money—which is as near to breaking the bank as any one can come.

"It is now that he should quit," said a woman at Selden's side. "If he keeps on he will only lose."

Perhaps the voice reached the prince's ears, or perhaps some such thought was in his mind, for he hesitated, as his stake was swept away after the next play, and passed his hand before his eyes, as though awaking from a dream. He tried again, however, and lost; a second time, and lost; a third time, and lost; then he tossed a thousand-franc note to the croupier, folded up his winnings and thrust them into his pocket, and made his way through a respectful crowd to the buffet.

It was not until then that Selden perceived the prince had a companion. A blonde young man who had been sitting next to him rose as he did, with an approving nod, and disappeared into the buffet with him. Selden scarcely had time to look at him, but he got the impression that he was very young, and also that he was an American. The prince had found a new victim, perhaps . . .

"Ah, M. Selden," said a voice at his elbow, and he turned to find the Baron Lappo smiling up at him; "the work is finished, then?"

"Yes; I got it off," answered Selden, and glanced behind the baron and on either side of him.

"The countess decided she would not come to-night," said the baron, interpreting the look. "I also would have sought my bed—the old need the

sleep of beauty even more than the young!—but, alas, I have responsibilities. Have you, by any chance, seen our little prince?”

“Yes,” said Selden, smiling at the adjective; “I think you will find him in the buffet.”

“So long as he is not playing!” and the baron breathed a sigh of relief.

“He has been playing—breaking the bank, in fact.”

“What, he has won?” exclaimed the baron.

“Hugely.”

“Then I am indeed alarmed! I must seek him. You will join us, I hope?”

“With pleasure,” said Selden, and followed the baron across the room.

The old diplomat was evidently well known and highly esteemed, for he had many respectful salutations to acknowledge, but the buffet was reached at last. The prince and the blonde young man, seated on a banquette in one corner, were watching a waiter fill their glasses with champagne.

The baron’s face darkened as he saw the prince’s companion.

“Imbecile!” he muttered under his breath, and advanced straight upon them.

The prince, raising his glass to his lips, raised his eyes also, and saw the baron.

“Come along, my old one!” he cried, no whit discomposed by the baron’s stormy face. “You also, M. Selden. Two more glasses,” he added to the waiter.

“Not for me at this hour!” protested the baron. “A demi Vittel,” and as the waiter hurried away,



he turned to the blonde youth. "I am happy to meet you again, M. Davis," he said. "I hope that your mother and your sister are well."

"Oh, yes, thank you," Davis responded.

"Permit me to introduce a compatriot of yours, M. Selden," went on the baron.

"Happy to meet you," said Davis, with a negligent nod.

Selden reflected that Davis did not seem particularly glad to see the baron. He was a good-looking youth, too young for his face to have taken on much character, evidently self-willed, and probably spoiled by that mother and sister for whom the baron had inquired.

The baron was regarding the prince with a mildly ironic glance.

"I hear you have been winning," he said.

"Yes—I had an inspiration for twenty-seven," the prince replied. "It is a long time," he added to Selden, "since I have had any luck."

"Perhaps it is the turn of the tide," Selden suggested. "I hope so!" and he raised the glass the waiter had filled for him.

"Thank you; it was time!" said the prince, and the three young men drank, while the baron sipped his water moodily. "You do not seem pleased, M. le Baron," added the prince, looking at him.

"For you to win!" said the baron with a grimace. "It is so unusual—like the sun rising in the west. I am wondering what great misfortune is about to happen!" and he added a sentence in a language which Selden did not understand—his native tongue, no doubt.

The prince flushed rebelliously, and the baron spoke another sentence, in a tone more peremptory. The prince nodded sulkily and rose.

"You will excuse us for a moment," said the baron, rising too, and he slipped his arm through that of the prince and led him away.

Davis stared after them speculatively until they disappeared through the door into the outer room.

"Queer duck, the baron," he remarked, and refilled his glass. "I wonder what game he is up to now."

"I met him just this evening," said Selden; "but I rather like him."

"Oh, he's all right," agreed Davis; "deucedly clever and all that—makes me feel like I belong in the infant class; but he is too blamed serious and he seems to think the whole world centres in that little speck he calls his country. I give you my word, I hunted it on the map for half an hour the other day before I found it, and then I could scarcely see it. Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, I've been there."

"The deuce you have! Now tell me," and he leaned closer; "did this old king really amount to anything?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean did his position amount to anything. Was he really a king, or was he just a joke?"

"Of course he was a king, the social equal of any other king. He married his children into the most exclusive courts of Europe."

"Yes, I know that. And if he got back again, it would be the same thing?"

"If he got back, he might have even more prestige," said Selden, "since there are fewer kings in business these days, and to get back would be a great feat."

"I see," said Davis, and settled back again in his corner.

Selden wondered what interest this youth could possibly have in the king's restoration—just his friendship with the prince, no doubt. It was evident that he had been drinking too much—just enough too much to flush his face and loosen his tongue. He could not be over twenty, and in spite of his good looks, there was something in his mouth and chin which spoke of weakness and self-indulgence. And it was also plain that his inhibitions to indiscreet utterance were not as strong as they should have been.

Selden was well aware that nothing is more revealing of a man's character than a glass of champagne too much. It loosens the tongue of the weak man—the ordinary man; breaks down his reserve and prods him on to talk carelessly and boastfully, to prove his importance at whatever cost. But with the strong man the effect is quite the contrary; he grows more guarded with every glass—the result, perhaps, of breeding, of wisdom gained by experience. At any rate, *in vino veritas* does not work with him.

But young Davis was not at all of this class. It was plain that he had neither breeding nor experience; and Selden told himself that a boy like that should be at work, or at least in college, not lounging in the Monte Carlo Sporting Club with no one to look after him.

"The thing I particularly object to in the baron," went on Davis, reverting to his original grievance after the manner of slightly tipsy men, "is that he seems to think I need a guardian."

On this point Selden thoroughly agreed with the baron, but he didn't say so.

"In what way?" he inquired.

"Oh, he's all the time trying to keep the prince away from me—seems to be afraid to leave us alone together! Good gad, if he only knew!" and he chuckled to himself.

"Are you staying here?" Selden asked, to change the subject. He had some scruples about encouraging champagne confidences.

"No; we've got a villa over at Cimiez—just above Nice, you know. But I'm over here a good part of the time. Dingy place, Nice, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do."

"I don't believe I've seen you before."

"No; I got in just this morning."

"From Paris?"

"No; from Austria."

Davis looked at him with sudden interest, as though struck by a new idea.

"What did you say your name is?" he asked.

"My name is Selden."

"Selden, that's it. You're not the chap who has been writing those articles in the *Times*?"

"Yes," Selden admitted; "but you don't mean to say you've read them?"

"Oh, no," Davis hastened to assure him; "too heavy for me. But my sister has—she's nutty about

them. I say, can't you come over and have lunch with us to-morrow?"

"Sorry," said Selden drily, "but I have an engagement." He had no desire to discuss central Europe with immature Americans.

"But look here," Davis protested; and then he sprang to his feet so violently that he nearly upset the table. "There you are at last!" he cried, his face beaming.

Selden turned to find that two women had approached and were standing just behind him—two most unusual women, both young; but one, the younger and prettier, evidently *jeune fille*; the other, the elder and more striking, just as evidently a poised and finished woman of the world.

"M. le Prince, ees 'e not 'ere?" inquired the latter in delightful English, and she permitted her eyes to rest calmly and inquiringly upon Selden, who had also risen, as though asking what right he had to be there and what manner of man he was.

"We are waiting for him," Davis explained. "The baron took him away a minute ago."

"Ah, le baron!" and she made a moue of distaste; "'im I 'ave no wish to see," and she started to move away.

"But look here," protested Davis, "the prince is expecting you—I want to see you."

"Farceur, eet is Cicette you wish to see!" she laughed, and glanced at the pretty girl beside her. And indeed it was at Cicette that Davis had been gazing—insufferable young fool, Selden told himself, to look at Cicette, mere milk-and-water beside this other woman, so distinguished, so unusual, so

surely poised—not beautiful exactly, but with such charm, such magnetism. . . .

Again her eyes were resting upon his.

“Do you speak French, monsieur?” she inquired in that language.

“Yes, madame.”

“Then say to this young man—for my English gives me shame—that we are going back for half an hour of *chemin-de-fer*. If he and M. le Prince care to join us before that, good; if not, we will look in here again on our way out. Thank you,” she added, when Selden had passed this on. “Come, *Cicette*.”

As she turned away, her eyes met his again in that same questioning, impersonal regard. Yet it was not altogether impersonal, for somehow, at bottom, it was deeply intimate—if one could only tear away a veil! Looking after her, he noted the exquisite poise of her head, how superbly she moved—like a queen; no, he had never seen a queen who walked like that! Why the devil hadn’t Davis introduced him?

*Cicette* glanced back over her shoulder and gave Davis an encouraging nod and smile as she passed from sight.

That young man, who had been watching, fascinated, dropped into his seat again and poured himself out some more wine.

“Isn’t she a corker?” he demanded.

“She is certainly a pretty girl,” agreed Selden, and was tempted to add a word of caution, but checked himself. After all, it was no affair of his. “Who is she?”

"Her name is Cicette Fayard. She is a niece of Madame Ghita. Believe me, madame takes good care of her—never lets her out of her sight—makes me feel like a beast of prey! I've been trying to pick up some French, so I can talk to her, but I haven't made much out of it yet."

"Madame Ghita?" repeated Selden. "That is the name of the elder one?"

Davis nodded.

Ghita. Selden repeated the word to himself, for it had awakened some faint echo of recognition in his brain. Ghita. Where had he heard that before? For the life of him he couldn't remember.

"She looks like a clever woman," he said.

"She is clever," agreed Davis; "the cleverest woman I've ever known." He spoke as though he had known hundreds.

"Is she a Pole?" asked Selden. "Poles are sometimes very clever—and the name sounds Polish."

"Oh, that's her husband's name," said Davis. "I don't know for sure, but I fancy she's French."

Again some memory stirred in Selden's brain, more strongly. Her husband's name. Ghita. And then it came like a flash.

Ghita—that was the family name of the old dynasty—the family name of the prince. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE SHORTCOMINGS OF REPUBLICS

**S**ELDEN did not attempt to explain to himself his sudden interest in this fascinating unknown, but he was determined to find out about her all that he could. His first impulse had been to chide Davis for not introducing him, but he suppressed it. If the lady was married—and especially if she was married to a Ghita—Davis might not have felt himself a free agent, though Selden doubted if he was even aware of the continental point of view in that regard. More probably it was merely lack of *savoir faire*. Even without an introduction, the lady had not hesitated to address him. She was not, then, too much bound by convention. But this was not a drawing-room—it was the Sporting Club at Monte Carlo. And she was not drinking tea; she was playing *chemin-de-fer*. These were points that were worth thinking over.

Selden offered Davis a cigarette, before lighting one himself, but Davis did not see it. His eyes were still fixed on the door through which the women had disappeared. Evidently the net was already around him.

“So she is married, is she?” Selden remarked casually. “Is her husband with her here?”

“What?” and Davis came to himself with a start.



"Yes—that is, she's not exactly married, either—not as we understand it. You see, it's like this. . . ."

He stopped abruptly.

"I am sorry to have been so long," said the baron's voice, and Selden looked up to find him and the prince smiling down at them. At least the baron was smiling, most urbanely; but it was difficult to tell whether it was good humour or suppressed chagrin that parted the prince's lips. "You have amused each other, I hope?"

"Oh, yes," said Selden; "we have been having a most interesting time."

"Good!" and the baron sank down again into his chair, and polished his glass thoughtfully. "It is disgusting, but even here affairs of state sometimes intrude."

The prince had resumed his seat against the wall and looked moodily at the champagne bottle. It was empty.

Selden caught the eye of the attentive waiter, who nodded and hurried away. He felt that he was upon the threshold of a most interesting disclosure, which a little more wine might precipitate. To be married, and at the same time not to be married! He was conscious that his objection to champagne confidences had considerably diminished. Besides, he wanted an excuse to stay awhile longer.

But a sudden silence had fallen upon Davis. He evidently felt himself back again in the infant class, and he glanced at the baron from time to time with a certain uneasiness, as a bad boy might glance at his master. The prince was also silent, staring

fixedly at the table in front of him, his lips pursed, his brows contracted in a frown. As for the baron, he was puffing thoughtfully at a cigarette, his eyes on the ceiling, immersed perhaps in those affairs of state of which he had spoken.

So they remained until the waiter brought the new bottle and filled fresh glasses.

The stimulant seemed to nerve the prince to do something he did not in the least want to do. He produced a bulky envelope from his pocket and handed it to Davis.

"I am very happy," he said, "to be able to repay you."

Davis took the envelope, evidently astonished, and glanced at the figures written upon it.

"But look here," he protested, "I don't want this—I don't need it—I'd rather you kept it."

"Impossible!" said the prince. "It is a debt of honour. I might not again be in position to repay it."

"Oh, all right, if you look at it that way," said Davis sulkily, and started to cram the envelope into his pocket.

"You find the amount correct, I trust?" put in the baron smoothly.

Davis glanced at the envelope again.

"As a matter of fact, I think it's too much," he said.

"But you have kept a memorandum?"

"Yes—since the prince insisted!" and he drew a little memorandum book from his pocket.

Selden could scarcely repress a smile. There is nothing more characteristic of the confirmed bor-

rower than insistence on keeping meticulous accounts. To enter the amount in a book is almost like placing it in a bank. It proves how conscientious one is.

"Please check it over," suggested the baron.

Davis did so.

"It's just as I thought," he said. "You've given me ten thousand francs too much."

The prince got out his own memorandum book, monogrammed in gold on the back, turned over the pages till he found the right one, and compared the accounts.

"Ah, see," he said; "you forgot to make this entry on the sixteenth—ten thousand francs."

"Please make it now," said the baron, "and mark the amount paid, after verifying the sum in the envelope."

Davis, his face redder than ever, made the entry, then broke open the envelope and drew out a packet of thousand-franc notes—at least fifty or sixty of them—ran through them with shaking fingers, nodded, stuffed them into his pocket and wrote Paid in large letters across the memorandum.

"It would be as well to add the date," said the baron.

Davis complied impatiently, and returned the book to his pocket.

"I hope you are satisfied," he said.

The baron nodded good-naturedly and lighted another cigarette.

"Yes—you are very good to humour me. Perhaps I may seem bourgeois," he went on to Selden, "but it annoys me to have debts of that sort hang-

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ing over us, for they are the most embarrassing of all. I know that many people call us adventurers, robbers, and other hard names. They say we never pay our debts. It is a lie. I admit," he added, with a smile, "that sometimes our money does not hold out and our creditors have to wait, but they expect that, and place it in the bill. In the end they are always paid." He paused and glanced at his watch. "One o'clock! I must be getting back to Nice. You will come with me, my prince?"

"No," said the prince; "I will return later with M. Davis."

"But I want to try my luck first," said Davis, and rose to his feet, evidently glad of an excuse to get away. "I also have an inspiration."

"I hope it may be a good one," said Danilo, and rose too. "I will come with you and see. Good-night, M. Selden. I hope to meet you again."

"You'll be sure to hear from my sister!" said Davis, and the two hurried away like boys released from school.

The baron watched them with a look between a smile and a frown; then he settled back into his chair, apparently in no hurry to start for home.

"Is it that you know the sister of M. Davis?" he asked casually.

"No, not at all; but he says his sister has been reading those articles of mine which annoyed you so much, and was interested in them—though I can't imagine why."

"Ah, yes," said the baron thoughtfully. "Well, it is true. As it happens, I know the sister of M. Davis, and have even discussed those articles with

her. She is a most intelligent young lady, and she was deeply impressed by your point of view."

"But why on earth should she be interested?"

"Ah, that!" said the baron, with a shrug. "Americans are interested in so many things. Believe me, M. Selden, I am quite sincere in saying that I found your articles admirable. It is true they annoyed me—the more so because I found them so good. But you took M. Jeneski's theories too much for granted. He is an able man—yes; but he is also an idealist. He does not see the practical difficulties in the way of carrying out his programme."

"Perhaps they are not so serious as you think," suggested Selden.

"Eh, bien, let us look at them for a moment. In the first place, you, as an American, are pre-possessed in favour of a republic. Is it not so?"

"I suppose so."

"The word means so much to you that sometimes you mistake the word for the thing it signifies. In my country they have as yet only the word. Jeneski, supported by the army, sets up a government and calls it a republic—that is all. It is not in any sense a republic; it is a military despotism."

"They are going to have elections next month," Selden pointed out.

"But how many people will vote at those elections? Very few outside the capital. Even they will be intimidated by the army, and will be afraid to vote, except for the government. For do not forget that not only does the army vote, but it will be in control of the polling-places. If all the people had the opportunity to vote without being terrorized

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or intimidated, and were given a free choice between Jeneski and the king, do you know whom they would choose? They would choose the king."

"Very possibly," Selden admitted. "They have all heard of the king, and very few have heard of Jeneski. Fewer still have any idea as yet of what a republic means."

"No, and they will never have," said the baron, "because it is not possible to give them a real republic. They must first be educated—they must be taught how to govern themselves. And it will be impossible to teach them because they will need all their efforts to keep themselves from starving."

"Well, they must take the chance," said Selden, "even if it requires generations. As I see it, the one outstanding result of the war is the triumph of democracy. If the people of Europe lose that, they have lost everything. As long as they hold on to it, no matter at what sacrifice, the war is worth all it cost them."

"But democracy does not necessarily mean a republic—that is a thing which Americans find very difficult to understand. There is England, for example—there is Holland, Belgium, Norway, Sweden. They are not republics, but they are none the less democracies—more truly so in some respects, perhaps, even than your own. I, too, recognize the triumph of democracy, and I rejoice in it; but that does not mean that we must place the government of the country in the hands of a mob. Quite the contrary. There is no despotism worse than mob despotism—nothing further removed from the spirit of democracy. When I speak of restora-

tion," he went on, "when I work for it, as I am working now, I do not mean the restoration of old autocracies, of outworn rights and privileges. I mean the restoration of order and enlightened government. A government must above all things have intelligence."

"Jeneski has intelligence," Selden pointed out.

"But he has no resources. A government must also have resources."

"Well," Selden began, and hesitated.

"I know what is in your mind," said Lappo quickly. "You are thinking that neither has the king any resources. That is true for the moment, and as long as it is true, he will not seek to go back. But if resources accrue to him, as they perhaps may, I say to you that Jeneski will be committing a crime against his country if he continues to oppose him."

He paused and glanced mechanically at his watch.

"Come," he said, starting to his feet, "I must be going. Pardon me for talking so much at such an hour! But it is a thing very near to my heart."

"I have been deeply interested," Selden hastened to assure him.

"I am most anxious for you to meet the king. He is not at all what people suppose him. He is—but you shall see for yourself. Ah, they never quit gambling in this place!" he added, as they passed through the door into the outer room.

The wheels were still turning without interruption. The crowd was greater than ever, but neither Davis nor Danilo was in sight. Selden suspected that they were in the inner sanctum dedicated to baccara, and he rather expected the baron to look

them up. But that worthy seemed to have dismissed them from his mind.

"You shall hear from me soon," he said, and held out his hand.

"I am going too," said Selden, resolutely beating back the desire to stay, to get another glimpse of that clever, unusual face; and together he and the baron went down the stair and got their coats.

"I am arranging a small dinner for to-morrow evening," said the baron suddenly, as they stood on the steps outside, waiting for his car. "If you are free, I should be very pleased to have you join us."

"Thank you. I shall be glad to."

"Good. I will let you know the time and place. Till to-morrow, then!" and the baron stepped into his car with a wave of the hand.

Selden stood for a moment looking after it, as it sped down the slope toward the Condamine. Then he turned the other way toward his hotel.

A strange man, the baron. More royalist than the king, more concerned for the prince than the prince was for himself, a courtier to the bone, a man who knew the secrets of every court, the skeletons in every closet.

And most probably not without skeletons in his own!

Well, there were few closets without a skeleton of some sort.

What, Selden wondered, was the skeleton in the closet of the Countess Rémond? That grim tragedy in the wood behind Bouresches?

And what game was the baron playing? Working for a restoration—yes; but why had he com-



pelled the prince to return those many thousands of francs to Davis in so summary a fashion? Most extraordinary that—as though he were trying to impress some one with his probity.

Davis, perhaps; but why should he care to impress Davis? Who, after all, was Davis?

And who was Madame Ghita?

Pondering these and other questions, Selden mounted to his room and went to bed. He could find an answer to none of them, but he had a sense of pleasurable excitement, for he felt that, in some strange way, he had been drawn into an extraordinary drama.

And its most interesting personage was undoubtedly Madame Ghita.

## **PART II.—TUESDAY**



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ROAD TO EZE

**M**ONTE CARLO, like all other pleasure resorts, has its inexorable routine, and the feature of the morning is a walk upon the terrace. This is followed by an apéritif and half an hour of gossip under a sun-shade in front of the Café de Paris, these two items occupying the time pleasantly until lunch, when the day really commences.

The terrace pedestrians begin to gather about eleven o'clock, reach their densest an hour later, and then gradually thin away. To sit during that hour on one of the benches which face the walk is a rare privilege.

For the human stream is of never-ceasing interest. There is the nouveau-riche and his family, not yet accustomed to the wealth the war showered upon them, ill at ease in their new clothes, glancing apprehensively at every one as though expecting an accusation; there is the prognathous Englishman masking his mental vacuity with an air of aloofness, but alert to salute every one he considers his social equal; there are old roués of every nationality, hair plastered down (if there is any left), moustaches waxed to a point, great pouches under the eyes, ogling the women, especially the very young ones, and turning around for another look at their

legs and the motion of their hips; there is the stream of semi-paralytics, neurasthenics, and debile generally, flowing ceaselessly in and out of the hydro-pathic establishment at the end of the terrace, seeking relief from the results of unimaginable forms of debauchery; there are fat Turks and lithe Greeks who glare at each other; tall Russians and little Italians who fraternize; as well as a scattering of all the nationalities, scarcely yet knowing their own names, created since the war over the breadth of central Europe.

And then there are the women—the women who are the *raison d'être* for Monte Carlo and all resorts like it. It is to see the women, to permit them to exhibit themselves, that this morning parade takes place; it is to please the women the chefs in the great hotels labour; it is for them the orchestras play; it is to them the little expensive shops cater; it is for them the casino operates. And they are at their best, these women, on the terrace in the morning. The old ones are still in bed, the ugly ones shun the merciless morning light. Only the young and beautiful venture to sally forth, and some of them are superb.

There are celebrities, too, of a sort, and decorations of every degree, from the grand rosette of the Legion down to the humble "poireau"; there are grey-bearded Academicians, monocled diplomats, pallid artists, heavy-sterned generals, portly financiers. There is the Gargantuan McCormack, his hat pulled down over his eyes, his lithe little wife trotting beside him; there is the sallow Venizelos, not yet recovered from the shock of defeat, in close

confab with some other exile; there is the talented but enslaved Chalmirino with his ridiculous fat mistress; there is Marlborough and his next duchess; there is Suzanne, fresh from her victories at La Festa and twittering like a sparrow to two tall worshippers in flannels; there is Chevrillet, the great journalist, whose passion for play destroys him—these and a hundred others like them pass and re-pass, watch for a time the stupid slaughter of pigeons going ceaselessly forward on the semi-circle of lawn down near the water, and finally fade away.

Among this throng, Selden presently appeared in obedience to a command of the Countess Rémond, delivered to him that morning with his breakfast:

"I am in the mood for walking," she had written. "Please wait for me on the terrace."

So, since he had made up his mind to see the adventure through, here he was, walking up and down, looking at the crowd, and breathing deep draughts of the wonderful air. It was one of those exquisite mornings, bright and yet soft, which make the Riviera the most favoured of winter resorts. The air was full of ozone, there was a tang in it which gave a fillip to the blood; the sea was of a deep and lustrous blue defying description, flecked here and there with whitecaps and dotted with the sails of a flotilla of little sloops engaged in a race. On the landward side, steep slopes, clad with vine and olive and dotted with white villas, rose up and up, until they culminated with a mighty rush in the rocky summit of the Tête de Chien, two thousand feet above.

A fairy-land; a land of wonder and delight.

Selden turned from this loveliness and looked again with a feeling of disgust at the people loitering past. Was it for this crowd of parasites and voluptuaries that this superb corner of the world had been created? He had asked himself the same question once before as he sat in the dining-saloon of a great new ship, homeward bound from Europe—was it merely to minister to the pleasures of that crowd, and other crowds like it, that men had laboured and sweated and died in the fabrication of that marvellous boat? What mockery, what waste! No wonder socialists see red! And then he had remembered the hundreds in the steerage—to them the ship was an ark, a sanctuary. It was bearing them to the land of freedom.

But here there was no such saving purpose; it was all mean, all sordid, compact of vanity and greed and sensuality. . . .

Then, suddenly, his eyes saw the face they had been searching for, almost without his knowledge—the arresting and clever face of Madame Ghita. She, at least, had no reason to fear the light, nor had the glowing young Cicette who chattered beside her. Madame Ghita was listening and smiling as though to a child, oblivious of the glances she attracted, with that air of supreme poise which Selden had noted and admired the night before. Would she see him, he wondered, his heart accelerating its beat. . . .

Yes, she saw him; her eyes rested in his for an instant, and she gave him a gracious little nod of the head as she passed.

He was unreasonably elated—yet why shouldn't

she nod? Monte Carlo was not a formal place; besides, he had been of some little assistance to her the night before in interpreting her to Davis. It was almost an invitation—should he turn and intercept her? And then he caught himself up grimly; really, he told himself, he was behaving like a boy of twenty, rather than like an experienced and somewhat disillusioned man of thirty-four. What could Madame Ghita ever be to him? Nothing, of course! Just the same, he would like to know her—no harm in that!—she looked stimulating. Perhaps she would pass again.

He turned at the end of the terrace—to find himself face to face with the Countess Rémond.

"How you walk!" she gasped. "Like the wind. And how people have stared to see me pursuing you!"

"They must think me very fortunate!"

"Ah, well—yes!" she smiled. "But had you quite forgotten me?"

"Forgotten you! My dear countess!"

"Then you must have been composing a new article, to stalk along like that with your head down, looking neither to the right nor left."

"No," said Selden, as he fell into step beside her, "I was reflecting how ironical it is that the most beautiful spot on earth should be—what you see."

"But it is always like that," she pointed out. "Not only the pleasantest places, but the nicest things, belong to the people who least deserve them. You should write an article about it."

Selden laughed grimly.

"That was a savage thrust!"



"What do you mean?"

"Don't you suppose I know how futile it is—writing articles?"

"Is it futile?" she asked innocently.

"The most futile thing on earth! I ought to know; I've been doing it all my life, and it makes me sick to think of it. But don't talk about it—don't spoil this beautiful morning. How can we enjoy it best?"

"Suppose you suggest something," she said, looking at him from under lowered lashes.

"You said you were in the mood for walking—did you mean just walking here on the terrace?"

"Not in the least. I meant walking over the eternal hills. See—I am dressed for it," and she held out for his inspection a slender foot shod sensibly—at least, not too foolishly.

"And I may have—how much time?"

"Until five o'clock," smiled the countess.

Selden was conscious that Madame Ghita and her companion had turned at the other end of the terrace and were coming back, but he kept his attention riveted on his companion—even, to his own ironic amusement, simulated an ardour he did not feel, and which caused her to rest curious eyes upon him.

"Splendid!" he cried. "Then here is the programme: we will go up to La Turbie, have lunch, walk along the Grande Corniche to Eze—do you know Eze?"

"No; is it a town?"

"Yes—a gem. And we will sit there and look at it and at the world stretched out beneath us, and

when we are quite ready, a car will bring us back. Will that suit you?"

"It will be lovely!" and she permitted her eyes to caress him the merest bit. "But I would point out that it is I who am taking your time, not you mine. If you have something else to do . . ."

"Nonsense!" Selden broke in. "I may be an American, but I don't work all the time! Come along!"

As they turned toward the steps, a bulky male figure suddenly loomed in front of them.

"Oh, how do you do," said the countess, and then Selden saw that the man with whom she was shaking hands was John Halsey, who had been Paris correspondent of the *London Journal* from time immemorial. "Do you know Mr. Selden, Mr. Halsey?"

"Selden?" echoed Halsey, who up to that moment had not looked at him. "Oh, hello, Selden. I thought you were somewhere in the Balkans."

He did not offer to shake hands and there was something faintly hostile in his air.

"No, I'm here," said Selden briefly, wondering if it could be possible that Halsey was jealous, or if it was just his British manner.

But Halsey had already turned back to the countess.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," he said. "I got in just a few minutes ago and they told me at the hotel that you had gone out. I want you to come to lunch with me. We must have a talk."

There was something in his air at the same time

threatening and cringing—like a tiger conscious of his strength, but chilled to the bone at sight of the trainer's whip.

"I am sorry," said the countess, "but I have an engagement."

"Who with?"

"Mr. Selden and I are going to lunch at La Turbie," she explained sweetly, but there was a dangerous gleam in her eye.

Halsey started to say something, but saw the gleam and checked himself.

"Dinner, then?" he asked.

"No, I am engaged for dinner also. But I shall be back at five. Call me up," and she nodded curtly and turned definitely away.

Selden, glancing back as they mounted the steps together, saw that Halsey was still standing there, hat in hand, staring after them with a look anything but pleasant. Yes, the fool must be jealous; but even then he had no right to speak to the countess so rudely. However, he wasn't going to waste any time over Halsey, and he put him definitely out of his mind.

He stopped a second at the hotel to order a car sent on to Eze, and ten minutes later they were in the funicular, and its little engine was puffing and panting as it pushed them steeply upward toward La Turbie, with Monaco and the serrated coast opening out superbly below.

The carriage was filled with tweed-clad English on their way to the golf course on Mont Agel, and the feminine members of the party regarded Selden and his companion with evident distrust, as of an-

other world, while the men seemed loftily unaware of their existence. It always amused Selden, this barrier with which the average Englishman tries to surround himself in public, and he watched now with a smile as the party, like a herd of deer scenting danger, drew together into a compact mass and hastily got the barrier into place.

As he glanced at his companion, he saw that she was smiling, too, though it might have been with pleasure at the magnificent panorama opening below them, upon which her eyes were fixed.

For the first time that morning he had the chance to take a really good look at her. She had no reason to fear the light, though there was nothing girlish about her; indeed, she looked a little older than she had the night before—thirty, perhaps. Every line of her face bespoke the mature woman of the world, but the flesh was smooth and firm, the eyes unshadowed, the lips fresh and rounding upward a little at the corners. It was not so arresting as when he had first seen it—that quality had perhaps been due to art—but it was still unusual, with a suggestion of the unplumbed and unfamiliar—of age-old jealousies and intrigues and ambitions. It had race, as distinguished from ancestry. In fact, Selden doubted if there was any ancestry—that was one of the things she would tell him. For he was determined now that he would have her story—and not only her own, but Lappo's and Danilo's. He knew exactly where he was going to take her to unfold it, and exactly what he was going to say.

She felt his eyes upon her face, and glanced at him, and smiled, and looked away again. And

ing a barrow of manure to the fields. And what thought stirs the girl's brain as she gazes after the vanishing car?

"Perhaps no thought at all," said the countess, when Selden put this question to her. "Do not make the mistake of endowing the peasantry with your own mentality, as so many reformers do."

"I don't. And I'm not a reformer," he protested. "Just the same, I suppose they have some feelings."

"Their feelings are centred in their stomachs. Give them a full stomach and they are happy."

"You talk like Baron Lappo."

"Do I? Well, the baron is a very clever man, and he understands the peasantry. Nine-tenths of the people of his country are peasants. Americans cannot understand them because America has no peasants. And so you credit them with noble aspirations—patriotism, liberty!—whereas all they really seek is enough to eat."

"I suppose," said Selden, "that you are referring to those articles of mine which annoyed the baron."

"Yes, I am. I think them altogether mistaken. I admire your optimism, but it carries you too far."

Selden glanced at her curiously. He was surprised that she should speak so earnestly.

"According to your idea," he said, "the best government is the one which gives its people the most to eat for the least return in labour."

"Yes; you put it very well. That is it exactly. How can one believe anything else?"

Selden turned the idea over in his head.

"The best government undoubtedly," he agreed, "is the one that gives every man a square deal."

"Yes."

"And that is where the old despotisms failed. They exploited the people for their own benefit."

"It is where every government fails. The people are always exploited for somebody's benefit."

"At least they have swept away the despotisms—not one is left standing in the length and breadth of Europe. That is why I think Europe—war-torn, bankrupt, disordered as she is—is still better off to-day than she has ever been, because for the first time in history her people are free."

"But they are not free," protested the countess impatiently. "They are still slaves to their stomachs—more than ever, indeed, since food is more difficult to get. It is absurd to call them free. What is freedom worth to a starving man? He prefers food. And he must always have a master."

"At least he can choose his master."

"But not at all. The peasant can never choose his master. Do you imagine the Russian peasants chose Lenin?"

"No, of course not."

"Or that the peasants of my own country chose Jeneski?"

There was something in her voice, a strange vibrancy, as she uttered the name, which made him look at her. She was gazing straight ahead, her nostrils distended with passion, her lips quivering—and then suddenly her face changed and she threw up her hand with a little cry.

"Ah, look there!"

They had come to a turn in the road—that marvellous road, so wide, so perfect, hung miraculously

against the mountain-side, one of Napoleon's masterpieces—and below them lay the village of Eze, unaltered since the Dark Ages.

Its founders, whoever they were, must have had the fear of pirates driven deep into their souls; perhaps they came from a town which had been stormed and looted, and were resolved to run no risk the second time. So they had chosen for their new abode the top of a precipitous pinnacle, unapproachable on any side save one, and almost unapproachable on that. With unimaginable labour they had contrived a village there, half dug from the rock, half built of the rock fragments. At the extreme summit they had reared a great citadel, as a last refuge if the town was stormed, and around the whole they had flung a heavy wall pierced by a single gate, flanked with defending towers.

So well they built, so solidly, that the town still stands as it has stood for twenty centuries, the wonder of the twentieth. Only the citadel, no longer needed with the passing of the sea-robber, has fallen into ruin and been despoiled for the repair of the other houses.

Selden and the countess stood spellbound, gazing down upon it and upon the marvellous background against which it is silhouetted—a background of hill and water and curving coast; then by a common impulse they turned into a by-path, and started to clamber down toward it through the vineyards and olive groves, past little houses, to the highway—the Lower Corniche—which runs at the foot of the summit upon which Eze stands; then up again along a steep and narrow road, through the gateway, past

the frowning walls, around the little church, and between the dismal houses leaning precariously forward above the steep and narrow passages which serve as streets—passages redolent of the Middle Ages, reeking still with the bloody deeds of Roman and Lombard, Sicilian and Saracen, Guelph and Ghibelline; for each in turn held Eze and made of it the foulest den of thieves in Europe, a haven for the scoundrels of every land. . . .

Up and up they scrambled, Selden and the countess, pausing now for breath, now to look at a traceried window, where once, perhaps, Beatrix of Savoy had leaned to toss a flower to her sweet troubadour, Blacasette—up and up, until they came out upon what had been the floor of the donjon, but was now a wide platform open to the sky.

And as they looked around, it seemed that the whole world lay at their feet.

At one side of the platform, facing the sea, stood a rude bench.

"Let us sit down," said Selden, then got out his pipe, filled it deliberately, lighted it and took a long puff. "Now," he added, "I am ready for the story."



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COUNTESS IN ACTION

**F**OR a moment the Countess Rémond did not speak, and Selden could see that her thoughts were turned inward, as though seeking some starting-point, some end to get hold of in the unravelling of a tangled web. He did not suspect that, realizing her moment was at hand, she was gathering her forces to meet it and casting a final glance over her plan of campaign.

"Why did you send for me last night?" he prompted.

"I wanted to thank you."

"Yes—but there was something else."

"I was going to implore your assistance in saving a people's freedom," she answered, smiling as if at her own impulsiveness.

"And you no longer need it?"

"I no longer believe their freedom is in danger."

"You are speaking of your own people, of course."

"Yes."

"You mean, then, that this new plot of Lappo's, whatever it is, will come to nothing?"

"On the contrary, he will succeed; and the country will be better off."

"He told you last night what his plans are?"

"Yes—some of them."

"He expects, of course, to put the king back?"

"Of course."

"It is difficult to take the king seriously," said Selden. "He has always been a sort of comic-opera king, posing as the primitive chieftain of a splendid primitive race."

"Perhaps it was not a pose," the countess suggested.

"Perhaps not—but one can't help suspecting a man with such a genius for publicity. And he was not always primitive. He was the cleverest intriguer in Europe; even in the war he tried to be on both sides at once."

"Because he wanted to save his country. How can one serve a little country like that except by intrigue?"

Selden took a few reflective puffs.

"Well, I don't know," he said at last. "I've never met him, so perhaps I'm prejudiced. But I do know this—while he was on the throne, the country was absolutely his to do as he pleased with. He was good-natured, democratic, interested in his people—even Jeneski admits that!—but he had his evil moments when frightful injustices were done. Anybody who disagreed with him was exiled. But the principal vice of the whole system was that the people had no voice in their government."

"How much voice have they now?" inquired the countess.

"Not much, I grant you, because they're too ignorant. But as they grow more fit, they'll take a larger and larger part."

"Perhaps—if they do not starve meanwhile."

"Anyway," added Selden, "it isn't merely a ques-

tion of the old king. Nobody would object if he could gather up a few millions somewhere and go back and spend them on his country. But he won't live long, and then it will be a question of Danilo. What about him? Is he the sort of man to save a country from starvation?"

"He would have Lappo," pointed out the countess.

"It's a shame," mused Selden, "that Lappo can't work with Jeneski. What a team that would make!"

"But he can not," said the countess. "He would consider himself a traitor."

Selden nodded.

"Yes, I know."

The two fell silent, gazing thoughtfully out over the sea.

"You have told me nothing about yourself," he said at last.

"Do you want to know?" and she cast him a quick glance.

"I can't help wondering . . ."

"About that man you discovered signalling to the Germans?"

Selden nodded without looking at her.

"That man was Lappo's son," said the countess.

Selden stared.

"Lappo's son?"

"The son of a woman he loved very much. He had made a state marriage—a very unhappy one—and had a legitimate son, so he could not acknowledge the other. But he got for him a little estate and the courtesy title of Count Rémond. Afterwards he had reason to be glad he had not acknowl-

edged him, for Rémond's mother died, and he developed a streak of madness, became involved in frightful scandals and was finally sent to America. Practically all our people in America had settled in one place—at a little town in Montana where there was a great copper mine. Rémond came there. We met each other and—were married. He was not without fascination of a sort—and I was very young. Then came the war, and Rémond was soon travelling about the country in what he told me was the Allies' secret service. I saw him very little. When America entered the war, he enlisted. I was very proud of him. I never suspected what he was really doing until I heard. . . ."

"But how could you hear?" asked Selden. "It was a military secret."

"The baron found out. He had sources of information."

"Then he knows. . . ."

"That you were the one who denounced Rémond? But of course!"

Selden involuntarily glanced behind him.

"Oh, do not fear," said the countess with a smile.

"He is glad the traitor was caught so soon. He may even speak to you about it."

Yes, that would be like the baron! Here, then, was one of the skeletons concealed in his private closet! Selden wondered how many more there were.

"Well," he said, at last, "and afterwards?"

"Afterwards," the countess paused an instant; "afterwards the baron was very kind to me. He sent me money, he invited me to place myself under

his protection—but he himself was soon an exile, for the Austrians overran the country, and he had time to think only of his king. So it was not until Jeneski came back that I could return.”

“You came with Jeneski?” asked Selden curiously, wondering what the baron had thought of that.

The countess nodded, her lip caught between her teeth.

“He and my father had been dear friends,” she explained. “When my father died, Jeneski in a way adopted me. So he took me back with him, and succeeded in having my little estate restored to me.”

A very seductive adopted daughter, Selden thought; a rather disturbing one. The countess’s story had rung true up to this point, but here it was not quite convincing.

“The estate—it is an attractive one, I hope?” he queried.

“It is not bad—but I could not stay there.” The note of passion was in her voice again, and her hands were clenched. “It was impossible. I could not do it. So I came away to Paris—to Monte Carlo—to amuse myself—to forget!”

“One can amuse oneself better here, that is true,” Selden agreed, searching for a clue to her emotion. “But weren’t you interested in seeing how Jeneski’s experiment works out?”

“Jeneski!” she repeated hoarsely. “Ah, you do not know him! He is not a man—he is a machine which crushes people who get in his way. He . . .”

She stopped abruptly, struggling for self-control.

“Yes,” said Selden, “I suppose all fanatics are more or less like that.”

threatening and cringing—like a tiger conscious of his strength, but chilled to the bone at sight of the trainer's whip.

"I am sorry," said the countess, "but I have an engagement."

"Who with?"

"Mr. Selden and I are going to lunch at La Turbie," she explained sweetly, but there was a dangerous gleam in her eye.

Halsey started to say something, but saw the gleam and checked himself.

"Dinner, then?" he asked.

"No, I am engaged for dinner also. But I shall be back at five. Call me up," and she nodded curtly and turned definitely away.

Selden, glancing back as they mounted the steps together, saw that Halsey was still standing there, hat in hand, staring after them with a look anything but pleasant. Yes, the fool must be jealous; but even then he had no right to speak to the countess so rudely. However, he wasn't going to waste any time over Halsey, and he put him definitely out of his mind.

He stopped a second at the hotel to order a car sent on to Eze, and ten minutes later they were in the funicular, and its little engine was puffing and panting as it pushed them steeply upward toward La Turbie, with Monaco and the serrated coast opening out superbly below.

The carriage was filled with tweed-clad English on their way to the golf course on Mont Agel, and the feminine members of the party regarded Selden and his companion with evident distrust, as of an-

other world, while the men seemed loftily unaware of their existence. It always amused Selden, this barrier with which the average Englishman tries to surround himself in public, and he watched now with a smile as the party, like a herd of deer scenting danger, drew together into a compact mass and hastily got the barrier into place.

As he glanced at his companion, he saw that she was smiling, too, though it might have been with pleasure at the magnificent panorama opening below them, upon which her eyes were fixed.

For the first time that morning he had the chance to take a really good look at her. She had no reason to fear the light, though there was nothing girlish about her; indeed, she looked a little older than she had the night before—thirty, perhaps. Every line of her face bespoke the mature woman of the world, but the flesh was smooth and firm, the eyes unshadowed, the lips fresh and rounding upward a little at the corners. It was not so arresting as when he had first seen it—that quality had perhaps been due to art—but it was still unusual, with a suggestion of the unplumbed and unfamiliar—of age-old jealousies and intrigues and ambitions. It had race, as distinguished from ancestry. In fact, Selden doubted if there was any ancestry—that was one of the things she would tell him. For he was determined now that he would have her story—and not only her own, but Lappo's and Danilo's. He knew exactly where he was going to take her to unfold it, and exactly what he was going to say.

She felt his eyes upon her face, and glanced at him, and smiled, and looked away again. And

presently the engine shrieked and panted to a stop and they clambered out.

Sixteen hundred feet below them Monaco lay glittering in the sun, while to right and left stretched the indented coast, from the chersonese beyond Beaulieu to Bordighera and the Italian hills, with the blue, blue sea mounting to an horizon which seemed grey by contrast—a panorama which, perhaps, is equalled nowhere on earth.

It still lay below them as they sat at lunch on the terrace of the hotel, and talked, by tacit consent, of indifferent things; and presently he had bought her an iron-tipped cane and they were setting forth through the little town.

La Turbie is one of those old, old villages built ages ago along this coast high in the mountain fastnesses for safety from the Barbary corsairs and the miscellaneous pirates who roamed up and down the Mediterranean, raiding and sacking and seeking what they might devour. It was captured by the Romans two thousand years ago, and is overshadowed by the ruins of a great stone tower which Augustus set up to commemorate the victory. Its narrow streets and dingy rubble houses have come unchanged through the ages, and are still inhabited by the descendants of the old tribes the Romans conquered, following the same trades in the same way, and living the same lives.

Except that now they must dodge the motor cars which flash ceaselessly through the town along the Grande Corniche. Strangest contrast of the ages, the silken, jewelled femme du monde who glances out carelessly at the rough-clad, red-faced girl push-



ing a barrow of manure to the fields. And what thought stirs the girl's brain as she gazes after the vanishing car?

"Perhaps no thought at all," said the countess, when Selden put this question to her. "Do not make the mistake of endowing the peasantry with your own mentality, as so many reformers do."

"I don't. And I'm not a reformer," he protested. "Just the same, I suppose they have some feelings."

"Their feelings are centred in their stomachs. Give them a full stomach and they are happy."

"You talk like Baron Lappo."

"Do I? Well, the baron is a very clever man, and he understands the peasantry. Nine-tenths of the people of his country are peasants. Americans cannot understand them because America has no peasants. And so you credit them with noble aspirations—patriotism, liberty!—whereas all they really seek is enough to eat."

"I suppose," said Selden, "that you are referring to those articles of mine which annoyed the baron."

"Yes, I am. I think them altogether mistaken. I admire your optimism, but it carries you too far."

Selden glanced at her curiously. He was surprised that she should speak so earnestly.

"According to your idea," he said, "the best government is the one which gives its people the most to eat for the least return in labour."

"Yes; you put it very well. That is it exactly. How can one believe anything else?"

Selden turned the idea over in his head.

"The best government undoubtedly," he agreed, "is the one that gives every man a square deal."

"Yes."

"And that is where the old despotisms failed. They exploited the people for their own benefit."

"It is where every government fails. The people are always exploited for somebody's benefit."

"At least they have swept away the despotisms—not one is left standing in the length and breadth of Europe. That is why I think Europe—war-torn, bankrupt, disordered as she is—is still better off to-day than she has ever been, because for the first time in history her people are free."

"But they are not free," protested the countess impatiently. "They are still slaves to their stomachs—more than ever, indeed, since food is more difficult to get. It is absurd to call them free. What is freedom worth to a starving man? He prefers food. And he must always have a master."

"At least he can choose his master."

"But not at all. The peasant can never choose his master. Do you imagine the Russian peasants chose Lenin?"

"No, of course not."

"Or that the peasants of my own country chose Jeneski?"

There was something in her voice, a strange vibrancy, as she uttered the name, which made him look at her. She was gazing straight ahead, her nostrils distended with passion, her lips quivering—and then suddenly her face changed and she threw up her hand with a little cry.

"Ah, look there!"

They had come to a turn in the road—that marvellous road, so wide, so perfect, hung miraculously

against the mountain-side, one of Napoleon's masterpieces—and below them lay the village of Eze, unaltered since the Dark Ages.

Its founders, whoever they were, must have had the fear of pirates driven deep into their souls; perhaps they came from a town which had been stormed and looted, and were resolved to run no risk the second time. So they had chosen for their new abode the top of a precipitous pinnacle, unapproachable on any side save one, and almost unapproachable on that. With unimaginable labour they had contrived a village there, half dug from the rock, half built of the rock fragments. At the extreme summit they had reared a great citadel, as a last refuge if the town was stormed, and around the whole they had flung a heavy wall pierced by a single gate, flanked with defending towers.

So well they built, so solidly, that the town still stands as it has stood for twenty centuries, the wonder of the twentieth. Only the citadel, no longer needed with the passing of the sea-robber, has fallen into ruin and been despoiled for the repair of the other houses.

Selden and the countess stood spellbound, gazing down upon it and upon the marvellous background against which it is silhouetted—a background of hill and water and curving coast; then by a common impulse they turned into a by-path, and started to clamber down toward it through the vineyards and olive groves, past little houses, to the highway—the Lower Corniche—which runs at the foot of the summit upon which Eze stands; then up again along a steep and narrow road, through the gateway, past

the frowning walls, around the little church, and between the dismal houses leaning precariously forward above the steep and narrow passages which serve as streets—passages redolent of the Middle Ages, reeking still with the bloody deeds of Roman and Lombard, Sicilian and Saracen, Guelph and Ghibelline; for each in turn held Eze and made of it the foulest den of thieves in Europe, a haven for the scoundrels of every land. . . .

Up and up they scrambled, Selden and the countess, pausing now for breath, now to look at a traceried window, where once, perhaps, Beatrix of Savoy had leaned to toss a flower to her sweet troubadour, Blacasette—up and up, until they came out upon what had been the floor of the donjon, but was now a wide platform open to the sky.

And as they looked around, it seemed that the whole world lay at their feet.

At one side of the platform, facing the sea, stood a rude bench.

"Let us sit down," said Selden, then got out his pipe, filled it deliberately, lighted it and took a long puff. "Now," he added, "I am ready for the story."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COUNTESS IN ACTION

**F**OR a moment the Countess Rémond did not speak, and Selden could see that her thoughts were turned inward, as though seeking some starting-point, some end to get hold of in the unravelling of a tangled web. He did not suspect that, realizing her moment was at hand, she was gathering her forces to meet it and casting a final glance over her plan of campaign.

"Why did you send for me last night?" he prompted.

"I wanted to thank you."

"Yes—but there was something else."

"I was going to implore your assistance in saving a people's freedom," she answered, smiling as if at her own impulsiveness.

"And you no longer need it?"

"I no longer believe their freedom is in danger."

"You are speaking of your own people, of course."

"Yes."

"You mean, then, that this new plot of Lappo's, whatever it is, will come to nothing?"

"On the contrary, he will succeed; and the country will be better off."

"He told you last night what his plans are?"

"Yes—some of them."

"He expects, of course, to put the king back?"

"Of course."

"It is difficult to take the king seriously," said Selden. "He has always been a sort of comic-opera king, posing as the primitive chieftain of a splendid primitive race."

"Perhaps it was not a pose," the countess suggested.

"Perhaps not—but one can't help suspecting a man with such a genius for publicity. And he was not always primitive. He was the cleverest intriguer in Europe; even in the war he tried to be on both sides at once."

"Because he wanted to save his country. How can one serve a little country like that except by intrigue?"

Selden took a few reflective puffs.

"Well, I don't know," he said at last. "I've never met him, so perhaps I'm prejudiced. But I do know this—while he was on the throne, the country was absolutely his to do as he pleased with. He was good-natured, democratic, interested in his people—even Jeneski admits that!—but he had his evil moments when frightful injustices were done. Anybody who disagreed with him was exiled. But the principal vice of the whole system was that the people had no voice in their government."

"How much voice have they now?" inquired the countess.

"Not much, I grant you, because they're too ignorant. But as they grow more fit, they'll take a larger and larger part."

"Perhaps—if they do not starve meanwhile."

"Anyway," added Selden, "it isn't merely a ques-

tion of the old king. Nobody would object if he could gather up a few millions somewhere and go back and spend them on his country. But he won't live long, and then it will be a question of Danilo. What about him? Is he the sort of man to save a country from starvation?"

"He would have Lappo," pointed out the countess.

"It's a shame," mused Selden, "that Lappo can't work with Jeneski. What a team that would make!"

"But he can not," said the countess. "He would consider himself a traitor."

Selden nodded.

"Yes, I know."

The two fell silent, gazing thoughtfully out over the sea.

"You have told me nothing about yourself," he said at last.

"Do you want to know?" and she cast him a quick glance.

"I can't help wondering . . ."

"About that man you discovered signalling to the Germans?"

Selden nodded without looking at her.

"That man was Lappo's son," said the countess.

Selden stared.

"Lappo's son?"

"The son of a woman he loved very much. He had made a state marriage—a very unhappy one—and had a legitimate son, so he could not acknowledge the other. But he got for him a little estate and the courtesy title of Count Rémond. Afterwards he had reason to be glad he had not acknowl-

edged him, for Rémond's mother died, and he developed a streak of madness, became involved in frightful scandals and was finally sent to America. Practically all our people in America had settled in one place—at a little town in Montana where there was a great copper mine. Rémond came there. We met each other and—were married. He was not without fascination of a sort—and I was very young. Then came the war, and Rémond was soon travelling about the country in what he told me was the Allies' secret service. I saw him very little. When America entered the war, he enlisted. I was very proud of him. I never suspected what he was really doing until I heard. . . .”

“But how could you hear?” asked Selden. “It was a military secret.”

“The baron found out. He had sources of information.”

“Then he knows. . . .”

“That you were the one who denounced Rémond? But of course!”

Selden involuntarily glanced behind him.

“Oh, do not fear,” said the countess with a smile. “He is glad the traitor was caught so soon. He may even speak to you about it.”

Yes, that would be like the baron! Here, then, was one of the skeletons concealed in his private closet! Selden wondered how many more there were.

“Well,” he said, at last, “and afterwards?”

“Afterwards,” the countess paused an instant; “afterwards the baron was very kind to me. He sent me money, he invited me to place myself under



his protection—but he himself was soon an exile, for the Austrians overran the country, and he had time to think only of his king. So it was not until Jeneski came back that I could return.”

“You came with Jeneski?” asked Selden curiously, wondering what the baron had thought of that.

The countess nodded, her lip caught between her teeth.

“He and my father had been dear friends,” she explained. “When my father died, Jeneski in a way adopted me. So he took me back with him, and succeeded in having my little estate restored to me.”

A very seductive adopted daughter, Selden thought; a rather disturbing one. The countess’s story had rung true up to this point, but here it was not quite convincing.

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She stopped abruptly, struggling for self-control.

“Yes,” said Selden, “I suppose all fanatics are more or less like that.”

"I have known some who were human," said the countess more quietly, and closed her lips tightly, as though determined to say no more.

Selden could only ponder what she meant. How had she got in his way? What had he done to her? To him Jeneski had seemed very human—possessed by his idea, of course, ready to make for it any sacrifice; but full of fire, of sympathy, of understanding. Full of passion, too, unless his full red lips belied him.

"However," the countess was saying, "we need not concern ourselves about Jeneski. He will soon be replaced."

"I am not so sure of it."

"Baron Lappo is sure of it. I do not think you understand, Mr. Selden, what an extraordinary man the baron is. Nothing is concealed from him. He is in his way a great artist."

"I hope to know him better," Selden observed.

"And the king—he is not at all what you think. But you will see!"

"Yes—the baron has promised to arrange an interview."

"It will be to-night; the baron is giving a dinner."

"How did you know?" asked Selden, looking at her in some astonishment.

"I am to be there. You also are invited, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Well—you can make your observations! I advise you to keep your eyes very wide open."

Selden rubbed a reflective hand across his forehead.

"I confess," he said, "that these intrigues are too subtle for my intelligence. I don't seem to be able to find the key. However I shall do my best. I don't suppose you can tell me any more?"

"Only in confidence. You would not want that."

"No," agreed Selden slowly, "I wouldn't want that. I must be free to use whatever I find out, if I think it necessary."

"I understand, and you are right," she nodded, and glanced at her watch. "Come, we must be going. This dinner is a most important one for me. I must dress for it carefully."

"Do you know who will be there?"

"The king, Danilo, Lappo, yourself, myself, and—two or three other women."

"Madame Ghita, perhaps?" hazarded Selden, and watched her face.

She could not suppress a little start.

"You know Madame Ghita?"

"She was enquiring for the prince at the Sporting Club last night. I happened to hear her."

"Ah," said the countess; "then of course you can guess who she is!"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Selden slowly, with a little sinking of the heart. He had hoped against hope that there might be some other explanation. Ah, well, if she were Danilo's mistress that ended it.

The countess was looking at him curiously.

"Then you knew perfectly well that she will not be at the dinner to-night. Were you setting a trap of some sort?"

"No—but I wondered who she was. I wasn't sure."

"Well, you are now!" she said, and held out her hand to him, and he helped her down the rocky descent to the town. She permitted herself to lean against him once or twice, but he was too preoccupied to notice. Madame Ghita—the mistress of the prince!

The countess looked at him occasionally, trying to read his thoughts, but she did not speak again until they were seated in the motor-car which was awaiting them.

"You saw the prince last night?" she asked.

"Yes; I went over to the Sporting Club after I finished my work. The prince was playing."

"And losing, of course?"

"No, he was winning heavily. He must have won two hundred thousand francs."

"Was he alone?"

"No, there was a young fellow named Davis with him."

"An American?"

"Yes—obviously."

"So it was from him he got the money!" she murmured, half to herself.

"I suppose so," laughed Selden. "Do you know him?"

"No, I have never met him."

"He is very young and callow, but I fancy he will get plenty of experience before long. First from the prince, and then from a girl who has him in her net."

"Did the baron see him?"

"Oh, yes; he seemed to know him quite well."

"And he was very much annoyed, was he not?"

Selden looked at her.

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, I guessed it! But please go on and tell me what happened."

"The principal thing that happened," said Selden, laughing a little at the recollection, "was that the baron made the prince repay the money he had borrowed—a considerable sum. The prince was very much annoyed."

"He would be," nodded the countess. "He has always found more amusing uses for his money than paying his debts with it. It must have been a new experience! But in this case it was necessary," she added, thoughtfully.

"I am glad you understand it so well," said Selden drily.

The countess laughed and tapped his hand playfully.

"Do not be cross," she said. "You will find it much more amusing to piece together the puzzle for yourself. And I am sure you will find the key at the dinner to-night!"

"I am not cross; I am only wondering if I shall see you to-morrow."

She glanced at him from under lowered lashes.

"If you wish," she said softly.

He moved a little nearer to her. Since Madame Ghita was unattainable, and this amusement offered . . .

"When will you be free?" he asked.

"All day."

"Shall we say dinner, then, at Ciro's?"

"That will be lovely!"

"Thank you," said Selden. "You are being very nice to me!"

"Ah, I have a good heart!" she laughed. "And perhaps I have some secret reason!"

They were speeding down the slope into the Condamine, when another motor panted past them so rapidly that Selden caught but a glimpse of its occupant. But his companion's eyes had been quicker.

"Did you see who that was?" she asked.

"No."

"It was Madame Ghita. And this is the road to Nice."

"What of it?"

"But it is at Nice the dinner is to take place!" cried the countess. "Surely you are not so stupid as you seem!"

Selden could only look at her. And suddenly the car jerked to a stop.

"We have arrived," she said. "Till to-night—and thank you for a delightful afternoon!"

And she ran quickly up the steps into the hotel.

## CHAPTER IX

### A KING'S APOLOGIA

**S**ELDEN dressed for dinner that evening with the same sense of nervous tension that he used to feel in the old days when tumbling out of bed and hustling into his clothes in the middle of the night to witness the jump-off of a big offensive. He had found a note from the baron awaiting him, naming 8:30 as the hour and the Villa Gloria on the Promenade des Anglais as the place, and expressing great pleasure that Selden was to be among the guests. Its perfect wording awakened in Selden fresh admiration for the supreme finish of the old diplomat, who was never at fault for the right word, the right look, the right gesture.

And presently, alone in a compartment of the express which hurtled through innumerable tunnels towards Nice, he had settled himself in a corner and endeavoured to draw such deductions as were possible from his afternoon's conversation with the countess, and to decide how much of it was grist for his mill.

There was a plot, it seemed, to get the old king back on the throne. But that was nothing new. There had always been such a plot, ever since the day when the king and his family and a few adherents had been forced to flee the country. A plot was taken so much for granted, and seemed so certain

to prove futile, that nobody gave it a second thought. Hitherto it had gathered to a head whenever the king was in extraordinary need of funds, and had faded away again as soon as the funds were secured from some too-credulous speculator.

But this time it seemed to be unusually serious, and involved, so the baron had hinted, not only the restoration of the king, but the financing of the country. Heaven knows it needed financing, and no doubt the baron was right—the king would be welcomed back with open arms, if only he brought some money with him. There was no doubt that he had won an immense personal popularity during his half century of power. Most of his subjects had never known any other ruler, and probably desired no other. He had mixed with them as a father with his children—an old-world father, to be sure, whose word was law. He had become a court of last resort to which his subjects were forever appealing to settle their disputes, especially their domestic disputes—a court the more highly esteemed because no fees were exacted, though the gift of a lamb, or a dozen chickens, or a crock of butter, was always appreciated.

He had lived in a state of patriarchal simplicity, carefully contrived and adroitly advertised, so that the peasant woman baked her bread with the pleasant consciousness that the queen baked hers also, and when some shop-keeper or petty farmer compared the time with the king in the public square of the capital, he saw that the king's watch was of brass like his own. When he went to the bank to make a little deposit, he was as likely as not to encounter



the king there, also putting aside a portion of his savings.

Moreover this far-seeing monarch had not relied on popular prestige alone, but had further strengthened his position by marrying his ten children into most of the courts of Europe. For his eldest son he had chosen a Hohenzollern princess; his eldest daughter was now queen of a dominion far larger than her father's; two other daughters had captured Russian Grand Dukes; and a strange turn of fortune, combined with a bloody tragedy, had brought a grand-son to a throne.

So, if any king could be safe, he had seemed to be—and yet all these safeguards had been swept away by the World War. The passion for democracy which emerged from it had decreed that kings must go, and Pietro had found himself cast aside with all the others. But a revulsion had already begun; the feeling was growing that an ordered government, however despotic, was better than a disordered one, however ideal in theory; and kings and princes, exiled in Switzerland or Holland or along the Riviera, were beginning to pick up heart of hope and gather their partisans about them.

Yet, Selden told himself, sitting there and turning all this over in his mind, despite the fact that this revulsion was being sedulously fostered by financiers and aristocrats and every one else who had been despoiled of money or power by the new order, there was not the slightest hope for any of them, except perhaps for this one canny old patriarch. Certainly there was no hope for the pompous coward at Doorn or the perjured neurasthenic at Lucerne.

But for this old autocrat—well, perhaps, if he could get hold of enough money to organize an opposition and carry on a campaign. No doubt many of his mountaineers thought he was still ruling over them!

The train creaked to a stop under the great glass-roofed shed at Nice, and Selden clambered down to the platform and made his way through the exit to the street. He saw that it was only a minute or two past eight, so he drew his coat about him and started to walk.

For the first time since the outbreak of the war Nice was experiencing a really prosperous season, and it had gone to the head of that mercurial city. The newly-named Avenue des Victoires hummed with traffic, the side-walks were crowded with chattering people, happy again in having a host of strangers to despoil. The gorgeous shops on either side were a blaze of light, with their choicest wares displayed in their windows. They were devoted almost entirely to articles de luxe, and they seemed to Selden, as he glanced into them, more luxurious and far more expensive than ever.

Where the money came from no one knew, but vaster sums than ever before were being frittered away on articles of vanity and personal adornment. The wealth of the world seemed to have passed suddenly into the hands of women, who were flinging it recklessly to right and left. The season at Deauville had been marked by an extravagance wild beyond parallel, by such gambling as the world had never seen. Now it was here, along the Riviera, that the orgy was continued. And not here only, as he well knew, but in Paris, London, Brussels, Berlin

—yes, even in Vienna and Budapest and Warsaw, before the eyes of starving spectators—the dance whirled on. Thoughtful men looked on aghast, but no one was wise enough to foretell how or when it would end. That the end would be disaster Selden did not for a moment doubt. He even looked forward to it with a certain pleasure!

The crowds in the street had delayed him a little, so at the Place Masséna he called a cab and gave the driver the address. In a moment they were clattering along the Promenade des Anglais, before a row of stately white villas and great hotels, looking out across the wide cement promenade upon the magic sea which stretched away to the horizon.

The Villa Gloria proved to be one of the most imposing of these edifices, with entrance barred by high iron gates, which were passed only after Selden had given his name and it had been duly checked upon a list in the hands of the concierge, who took a good look at him, evidently suspicious of any one arriving in a public cab. The establishment was plainly an elaborate one—maintained, so gossip said, from the private purse of the daughter who still retained a throne.

His hat and coat were taken from him by a bearded functionary in the native costume—which, to American eyes, savours so much of the bull-ring!—and another led the way up a wide stair, opened a door and announced him.

The room he entered was evidently the salon, but it was deserted except for the Baron Lappo, who was hastening forward across its empty spaces. Selden, rather taken aback, wondered uneasily if he

could have mistaken the hour, but if he had, there was no sign of it in the baron's greeting.

"It is a great pleasure to see you again," he was saying. "I have spoken of you to the king, and he is most desirous of meeting you. I shall take you to him at once."

Selden murmured his thanks and followed the baron down the length of the long room to a door at the other end. The baron knocked and, a voice bidding him enter, opened the door and motioned Selden to precede him. Stepping through, Selden found himself in a little room, blue with tobacco smoke, which was evidently the king's work cabinet. An imposing figure was seated at a desk near the window, and a secretary with a sheaf of papers was just making his escape through an opposite door.

Lappo led him forward.

"This is M. Selden, Your Majesty," he said.

The figure at the desk rose to its feet—an impressive height.

"I am glad to meet you, sir," said the king, in excellent English. "I have heard much of you and congratulate you upon your brilliant achievements."

Selden, considerably abashed by this greeting, had the impression that he was shaking hands with an institution rather than with a man. The Institution of Royalty. He murmured something and sat down, in obedience to the king's gesture. The king also reseated himself, his chair creaking loudly, but the baron remained standing.

Selden had seen a good many kings in the course of his career, but none who looked the part as this one did. The tall and dignified King of the Belgians

was the closest second, but he lacked the picturesqueness, the air of mastery and profundity, which marked this old man. He sat there as though he ruled the world; he imposed himself.

He wore, as always, the costume of his country, rich and colourful with embroidery, and for head-covering a flat round brimless cap of blood-red satin, with his arms in gold upon the front. It became oddly his dark, semi-oriental countenance, with its hawk nose, its grizzled moustache drooping on either side the full lips, and its deeply cleft chin. But it was the eyes which impressed Selden most. They were very dark and very large, and had a peculiar cast, or lack of focus, which gave them the effect of looking not at one, but into and through one and out on the other side, distinctly disconcerting until one grew used to it. Indeed, just at first, Selden had the impression that the king was gazing fixedly at some one behind him.

"I hope you will not mind," went on the king, "if I speak in French. I speak English, it is true, and I have insisted that all of my children should learn that language, though I regret to say that some of them forgot, as they forgot other of my teachings, after they left my house. But I have not in it the precision which I have in French."

"It astonishes me, sir, that you speak English so well," said Selden. "I found very few people in the Balkans who could speak it at all, unless they had lived in America."

"Ah, monsieur," said the king, a little sadly, "when one's kingdom is so small that from its centre one can see almost to its borders, and when beyond

those borders are age-old enemies searching ceaselessly for an avenue of attack, one must take care to neglect nothing. As you perhaps know, I have had six daughters and four sons. Yes, I believe in large families," he added, with a smile. "I once had a most interesting discussion upon that subject with your great Roosevelt. We found ourselves in entire accord. I wish I could have married one of my girls to one of his boys—it would have been for the good of the race!"

Selden nodded his agreement. Yes, that would have been a new strain! He was more and more fascinated by this astonishing old man.

"But what I wished to say," went on the king, "was this—that since my kingdom was such a small one—small, you understand, monsieur, in size, but very great in spirit, in tradition and in pride—it was necessary that I strengthen myself wherever possible by alliances. So my children were taught many languages, English among them, and since I could not permit them to be wiser than their father, I was forced to learn them too, though of course I learned them much less readily. But the effort they cost me has been many times repaid by the ability they gave me to converse with men of many nations, whose minds would otherwise have remained closed to me, and to read many things of which otherwise I should have been ignorant—your interesting articles upon my country, for example, and upon Austria and central Europe in general. I congratulate you again upon them—their point of view is not always mine, but I can see that they have been based upon an accuracy of observation and breadth of sympathy alto-

gether unusual. Will you have a cigarette? No? Tobacco is my one dissipation—I am getting too old for any other.”

He took a fat Turkish cigarette from a case on his desk, lighted it carefully, and blew an immense gust of smoke toward the ceiling.

“When my good Lappo told me this morning of having met you yesterday,” he went on, “and suggested that you be asked this evening half an hour in advance of the other guests, I thought it a most happy idea. Lappo has many happy ideas,” with a smile at the baron. “I should be lost without him. Having read your articles, I welcomed the opportunity to explain to you something of my point of view. It is no secret that I am trying to regain my kingdom, of which I have been unjustly deprived. I shall continue to try until I succeed, or until I die. It is a point of honour with me. But I infer from your articles that you would not be sympathetic toward such a restoration?”

“It seems to me, sir,” Selden answered, “that the republican form of government is best for any people, because it opens the way for opportunity and self-development. And I do not believe in the hereditary right to rule—to dispose of people’s lives and fortunes, and to control their happiness.”

“I do not see,” said the king, “that the hereditary right to rule differs in principle from the hereditary right to property. Because this right is sometimes abused, I do not suppose that you would abolish it altogether?”

“No,” said Selden, “I have not yet got quite as far as Communism. But I think hereditary for-

tunes—all wealth, indeed—should be limited and controlled.”

“So should the hereditary right to rule be limited and controlled—as it is in England, perhaps. Ah, I can see what you are thinking,” added the king, with a smile. “You are thinking that deposed monarchs are always democrats; that I am a new convert to this idea—but there you are wrong. I gave my people a constitution long ago. It was not as liberal as England’s, true; but one cannot scale a mountain at a single bound. One must climb step by step. Even republics are not always perfect!”

“Oh, they never are!” Selden agreed. “They sometimes do disgraceful things—unaccountable things—ours has in turning its back on Europe. But however ignorant and selfish they may appear, they are nevertheless a step forward toward the liberation of mankind.”

“Perhaps so; but I repeat that it may sometimes be too long a step to take safely all at once. My argument, monsieur, is this: One cannot suddenly give complete liberty to a people who for centuries have been accustomed to guidance and control without running the risk of very grave disaster. Civilization is the result of people working together, of a vast co-ordination. When government fails, and the people fall apart into little groups, each working for itself, civilization fails too. Rather than take such a risk, the wise man proceeds slowly and with caution—he seeks to lead the people upward gradually, a small step at a time.”

“That is true, sir,” agreed Selden. “The trouble is that in the past they have often not been led up-



ward at all, but kept ground down in the mud at the bottom of the pit by the fear and the greed of their rulers. If they have progressed, it has been in spite of their rulers."

"In the past, perhaps; not in the future. That day, monsieur, will never return. The war has liberated the world from slavery to old forms and old ideas."

"I believe so with all my heart," said Selden. "Our task is to keep it from sliding back again."

"But the war was not able to make men wise all at once," said the king. "So we must also take care not to become the slaves of new ideas which are worse than the old ones, or which are really only the old ones cleverly disguised with a new name. There will always be in the world, monsieur, men who seek wealth and power for unscrupulous and selfish ends. As I look about me at the present state of Europe, I fear sometimes that it is falling into the hands of such men. I fear . . ."

There was a tap at the door. The king glanced at a little clock on his desk.

"The other guests are arriving," he said, and rose. "I have enjoyed our talk very much, M. Selden, and especially your frankness. We must continue it sometime. Meanwhile I confide you to the good Lappo," and he bowed with the most engaging cordiality.

## CHAPTER X

### THE BOMB BURSTS

**S**ELDEN was conscious of a distinct liking and admiration for the old monarch as he watched him hasten forward to meet the new arrivals, two women and a man.

"It is M. Davis, with his mother and his sister," explained the baron, who had remained behind a moment until the king's greetings were over.

Selden saw with some astonishment that it was indeed the same young Davis whom he had met at the Sporting Club the night before. Why should the king invite these Americans to dinner? And especially why should he welcome them so warmly—with such graciousness combined with patriarchal dignity? Why should he pat Miss Davis's hand as though he were her father? What was the meaning of the baron's faultless deference? Who were these Davises, anyway?

These questions flashed through his head in the moment during which the king bent over the hands of the ladies and inquired solicitously about their health. Then it was the baron's turn; and then Davis turned and saw Selden.

"Why, hello," he said, and came over and shook hands. "Sis will be tickled to death to see you."

"Yes," said the king, whom nothing escaped, and

who had evidently been coached by his good Lappo, "I felt certain that Miss Davis would be glad to meet so distinguished a countryman—and you also, madame," and he brought Selden forward and introduced him.

The elder woman surveyed him through her lorgnette, evidently wondering who he was, and her greeting was perfunctory in the extreme, but when he shook hands with her daughter, he found himself looking into a pair of eyes fairly dancing with excitement.

"Yes, indeed," she said, "I am glad to meet you. Your articles seem to me perfectly wonderful. I have read them all!"

"That is a great compliment," said Selden, laughing a little at her enthusiasm. "I doubt if there is any one else who has read them all! You are interested in politics, then?"

"Oh, there was much more than politics—but I liked them especially because they were so—so brave, so optimistic."

The baron had drawn near and was listening smilingly.

"Too much so perhaps," said Selden, with a glance at him. "That, at least, is the opinion of M. le Baron."

"No, no; you do me wrong!" protested the baron. "I think merely that there is a safer road up the mountain than the one you indicate—at least up the mountains of my country, which is very mountainous indeed!"

"And perhaps you are right, M. le Baron," agreed Selden, amiably.

Miss Davis had been listening with an intensity which puzzled him.

"I want to be quite sure that I understand," she said. "M. le Baron and I have talked a great deal about your point of view. His idea is that the old régime could do much more for his country than is possible under the new one."

"If the old régime adopted some new ideas, and could arrange to finance the country, he is probably right," Selden conceded.

"Ah, mademoiselle, you see!" cried the baron, obviously elated. "It is as I told you! But come, the king has something to say to you."

What the king had to say seemed of a semi-confidential, not to say romantic, nature; at least Miss Davis laughed and blushed and shook her head. Left to himself for a moment, Selden had an opportunity to examine the two women.

As for the mother, her origin, character and ambitions were written large all over her—in her plump face with its insignificant features and bright little eyes like a bird's; in the figure, too fat, too tightly corseted; in the voice, too loud and not quite sure of its grammar; in the gown, too elaborate, and the jewels, too abundant—a woman who had once, no doubt, been a good sort with a certain dignity and genuineness, but who had been spoiled by prosperity and also, perhaps, by a careless and too-indulgent husband—an American husband. Selden could see him, in company with countless others, labouring away at home to make the money which his wife and family were frittering away on the pleasure-grounds of Europe!

The boy was curiously like her, but the daughter was of a different and much finer type, and Selden guessed that she carried on the father's strain. Not strikingly beautiful, but fresh-skinned and wholesome, with a face delicately chiselled and touched just the slightest, when in repose, by sadness or disillusion—just a little too old and too reserved for its years; in this respect more of Europe than of America. Perhaps it was the mother who had disillusioned her. . . .

But why should the king listen to them both with such attention? Why should the baron be so deferential? Could it be possible that these people had something to do with the plot?

The baron, seeing Selden standing alone, managed to guide him back to Mrs. Davis, whose cool greeting he had noted, and for which he proceeded at once to atone.

"It is not often we have with us a man of such wide influence as M. Selden," he began.

"The baron exaggerates," Selden hastened to assure her. "I am just a newspaper man, Mrs. Davis."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Davis, using her lorgnette again. Her experiences with newspaper men had not always been fortunate, and she distrusted them.

"But a newspaper man, as you call it, the most distinguished," the baron persisted. "Perhaps you have heard your daughter and myself discussing some of his theories."

"Perhaps I have," she agreed uncertainly.

"M. Selden is a democrat the most pronounced," went on the baron, no whit discouraged; "but we are

trying to convince him that a monarchy also may have its virtues."

"I am sure there is little to be said for democracies," said Mrs. Davis severely, as one lecturing a small child, "when one sees their horrible blunders. And such men!"

"They do blunder," Selden agreed; "but at least it is their own blunders they suffer from, so there is a sort of poetic justice in it."

"No, it is other people who suffer," said Mrs. Davis. "They rob every one. When I think that my income tax this year . . ."

She was interrupted by the announcement of the Countess Rémond, and was instantly so absorbed in contemplation of that unusual woman that she quite forgot to go on.

The Countess Rémond had said that she was going to dress with care, but Selden had foreseen no such finished perfection, and moreover it was at once apparent that she was as much at home in a king's drawing-room as in any other. Nothing could have been more correct, more perfect, than the way she acknowledged the introduction to the king which the baron made. The king himself regarded her with an appreciative eye, for he had always been a connoisseur of women, holding her hand the tiniest fraction of a second longer than was necessary, and took advantage of the moment when the baron was continuing the introductions to motion the major-domo to him and give him some brief instructions in an undertone. As that solemn functionary bowed and hastened away, Selden guessed that the king had

suddenly decided upon a rearrangement of the places at table.

The way in which the countess greeted the ladies was also a work of art, it was so charming, so cordial, so gracious, without a trace of that arrogance which alas! too often marks the bearing of ladies of the old world toward ladies of the new, and which indeed one might well expect of a countess. Her indifference to the men was almost as marked; she acknowledged their presence with the coolest of nods, and turned back at once to the women as far more interesting. The elder, flattered, almost inarticulate, was already at her feet, and the younger was visibly impressed. The countess was confiding to them something about her gown—the clumsiness of maids . . .

Selden noted the satisfied smile which the baron could not wholly repress, the energetic way in which he polished his glass. Evidently the countess was playing the game—whatever the game might be—very much to his liking.

"I have heard so much of you and of your daughter from my old friend, Baron Lappo," the countess continued to the enraptured Mrs. Davis, speaking with a pronounced and very taking accent which Selden had not heretofore noted in her speech. "Permit me to say that your daughter is lovely—the true queenly type!"

Mrs. Davis sputtered her delight. Her daughter blushed crimson. Selden gaped a little at the adjective. Queenly—now what did she mean by that? And looking at the countess more closely, he saw

that in some way she had subtly altered her appearance; her face seemed longer, her eyes had a little slant, her lips were not so full. . . .

"I see you are not accustomed to such frankness," she rattled on; "but I am frank or nothing. If I think nice things about people, I believe in saying them—yes, even to their faces; ugly ones, also, sometimes!"

"But you talk almost like an American!" cried Mrs. Davis.

"It was in America I learned my English," the countess explained. "I was there with my parents as a girl. At Washington."

Mrs. Davis had a vision of the countess's father as a great diplomat. But Selden had another start. She had not mentioned Washington to him that afternoon; she had spoken only of Montana.

Miss Davis had been looking at the countess intently, with startled eyes, as though striving to recall some memory.

"I should be so glad to talk to you about it," added the countess. She had noticed the girl's intent look, and turned full face to her, so that she got all the benefit of the slanting eyes and the thin, arched brows. "Perhaps you will have tea with me. . . ."

"You must have tea with us!" cried Mrs. Davis. "To-morrow?"

"If you wish," assented the countess with a gracious smile, which included the younger woman.

Meanwhile the king and the baron had been consulting together in undertones; from their aspect it was evident that something had gone amiss.



"I was forced to send Danilo on an important errand this afternoon," said the king finally, "and he has not yet returned. He has had an accident perhaps."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Mrs. Davis. "That would be too terrible!"

"If any one was injured," said the king with a smile, "it was undoubtedly some one else, in which case he would be detained only until he had satisfied the police. But I do not think we shall wait any longer. Baron, will you summon the Princess Anna?"

The baron disappeared and presently returned with a tall young lady on his arm. She was perhaps twenty-five, very dark, with a perceptible moustache, and very thin.

"This is my youngest daughter, Anna," said the king, "named, as all my daughters were, for one of the great saints of my country."

The Princess Anna bowed to the guests without taking her hand from the baron's arm. She, at least, seemed to have no reason to ingratiate herself with the rich Americans!

The king nodded, and the doors at the end of the room swung back, disclosing the gleaming table beyond.

"May I have the honour, madame?" and he offered his arm to Mrs. Davis.

Selden permitted young Davis to take the countess, and followed with the sister.

"Were you really in earnest a moment ago?" she inquired in a low voice.

"In earnest?"

"Yes—in saying the baron might be right?"

"Why, yes; entirely so," he answered, puzzled by the intensity of her look.

She took a deep breath and turned her head away for an instant.

And then they were at the table.

When they were seated, he found himself still at her right. Beyond her was a vacant place, evidently for Danilo, while beyond that, and to the right of the king, sat the countess. Selden smiled to find his surmise correct—even at eighty, the king had not lost interest in pretty women!

Mrs. Davis was at the king's left, while beyond her, the baron, the Princess Anna and young Davis, who had been adroitly detached from the countess, completed the company.

The king, with patriarchal dignity, asked grace in his native tongue, somewhat to the confusion of his guests. Selden could see Mrs. Davis regarding with a startled eye the red cap which the king made no motion to remove. Then came the soup, and she was startled again to see the Princess Anna rise and serve her father.

"In our country," the king explained, with a smile, seeing her glance, "it is the custom for the daughters to serve their parents. I consider it a very good custom, and my daughters have always followed it. As you know," he went on, tasting the soup with an approving smack of the lips, "I have a daughter who is a queen, but when she comes to visit her father, she still gives him to eat."

The picture of a queen ladling out the soup was too much for Mrs. Davis, and she gasped audibly. Or perhaps it was the soup, which she at that mo-

ment tasted. The king had brought his native chef with him from Goritz, and this soupe à l'oignon was one of his masterpieces, but it was rather a shock to the unaccustomed palate, especially if the cheese was a little strong. But since it came from a royal kitchen, Mrs. Davis battled with it manfully. The king asked for a second serving.

It was at that moment the prince appeared.

Selden was sure he had never looked more handsome. His eyes were shining; his dark skin, usually a little sallow, was most becomingly flushed. He seemed in the gayest possible mood—even a reckless mood.

"No, do not rise," said the king to his guests, motioned the prince to his side and put to him a stern question in his native tongue. The prince replied expansively; for an instant a scowl of displeasure threatened the king's countenance, then he smiled blandly round upon the company.

"It was as I thought," he said. "Fortunately no one was killed. Make your apologies, sir, to the ladies."

The prince, with a mocking light in his eyes, bent over Mrs. Davis, and raised her plump hand to his lips.

"It was really impatience to be with you, madame, which caused the accident," he said gaily. "A speed too swift—a road slippery from the rain . . ."

"Oh, what a fib!" broke in the lady, tapping him playfully with her lorgnette. But never for an instant did she suspect how great a fib it was!

The prince made his other greetings swiftly, then dropped into the seat beside Miss Davis, kissed her

fingers as he had her mother's, and spoke a low sentence into her ear. And Selden, noting the quick flush which swept across her cheek, noting the baron's attentive eyes, noting the king's benignant good-humour, understood in that instant the whole plot.

For a flash his eyes met those of the Countess Rémond, who was smiling cynically, maliciously, as though at some long-cherished vengeance about to be accomplished. Then he turned back to his plate, his heart hot with resentment. It was horrible that a girl like that should be sacrificed to the ambitions of a worldly mother! No wonder she was disillusioned! And to a libertine like the prince! Of that, of course, she could have no suspicion, and she would find it out too late. Of happiness there was not the slightest possibility.

Yet—was there not? He looked again at Myra Davis—there was something in her face that said she was not a fool, that she had had some experience of the world, so she must know something of the ways of princes. And it would be exciting to be the wife of a man like that—to be compelled to hold one's place against all the other women . . .

And he would teach her many things.

Of love, as the average American understood it—mutual trust, mutual respect, common interests, fidelity, placid affection—nothing at all; but there would be bursts of passion, shattering experiences, and if she were strong enough to survive being cast down from the heights from time to time, she might win through, might in the end even hold him. At least she might find such a life more interesting than the placidity of the meadows. There was always

that choice in life between emotion and tranquillity, and Selden had never been able to make up his mind which was the wiser.

To be a queen—even an unhappy one—even of a tiny kingdom . . .

But what of Madame Ghita? Did she know of this? Was that why they had met her driving toward Nice? Did she intend to interfere?

And was it conceivable that any man would leave a woman like that?

Probably the prince had no intention of leaving her—and again Selden glowed with indignation. But he was conscious, deep down in his heart, that his indignation was not so much for the girl at his side as for that other woman, about to be deserted, or, worse still, compelled to share . . .

He awoke abruptly to the knowledge that Miss Davis was addressing him.

"You have been there quite recently, have you not, Mr. Selden?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, guessing instinctively where she meant. "Only a couple of months ago."

"Are the people happy?"

"Yes, in a way. Of course life is very hard among those bleak mountains. But then it has always been. They are used to it."

"It is more hard than ever now, is it not?" put in the baron, from across the table.

"It is harder than ever all over Europe," said Selden. "This generation will never know the old ease."

"That is true," agreed the baron; "yet, with proper guidance, some nations will emerge more

quickly than others. What our little country needs is, first of all, a firm and experienced hand at the helm, and, secondly, capital to revive its industries, repeople its pastures and fertilize its fields. With those, it will be the first nation in Europe to find its feet again."

"Undoubtedly," said Selden; "but where is the capital to come from?"

"Do you really think he is right?" asked Myra Davis, in a low voice.

Selden was conscious that the eyes of the whole table were on them, and that the whole table was waiting for his answer.

"Yes, I really believe so," he said.

"And that the people would be happier?" she persisted.

Then he understood. Here at least was one of the forces urging her forward. But it would take millions—she should understand that.

"Yes," he said slowly, with a strange sense of responsibility. "They would be stronger, perhaps, if compelled to work out their own destinies. But not happier. Certainly they would be glad to have the way cleared for them. But to do it effectively would take a large sum—a very large sum—many millions."

There was no secret about it any longer—they were all sitting there waiting for her decision.

"And, mademoiselle," pursued the baron, "out little kingdom would be like home to you; since you have already lived so long among our people."

Selden looked the question he scarcely felt at liberty to utter.

"Nearly all of our people who went to America settled in one place," explained the baron, "in the town founded by the father of mademoiselle and named after him. There they assisted the development of an enormous property—a mountain of copper."

A great light burst upon Selden. So it was that Davis—the copper king! Well, there would be millions enough!

But those were the people who had come back from America to make their own country a republic also—Jeneski had told him the story; it was their labour which had amassed those millions which were to be used to rivet back upon them the chains they had broken! He did not know whether to laugh or weep at the savage irony of it!

The king had bent over toward Mrs. Davis and asked her a swift question, his face purple with excitement; she had glanced toward her daughter and a long look had passed between them. Selden could see the baron's mesmeric gaze upon the girl. She looked down, she looked up; then her cheeks went crimson, and she nodded her head.

The king, with beaming face, signed to the attendants to fill the glasses.

"Mesdames et messieurs," he said, rising, glass in hand, "I have in my life, which has been a long one, had many happy moments, but none so happy as this, when it is my privilege to announce the betrothal of my grandson and successor, Prince Danilo, and the fair young lady who sits beside him. Let us drink to their happiness and to that of my beloved country!"

He drained his glass, sent it crashing over his shoulder, trundled around the table, caught the girl in his arms, and kissed her resoundingly upon each cheek.

"My dear," he said, "the young rascal shall make you happy—I promise it. Otherwise, I will disinherit him, and you shall reign alone!"



## CHAPTER XI

### SELDEN MAKES HIS CHOICE

**I**T was difficult to quiet down, after that, and go on with the dinner.

The whole house was buzzing with the great news, and Selden was sure that champagne was being consumed even more liberally below stairs than above. Probably the king knew it too, but for once he did not care. Looking at him sitting there triumphant and benignant, Selden was reminded of nothing so much as of some Biblical patriarch—Abraham, perhaps. Certainly at this moment the king's bosom seemed wide enough to contain the whole world. He was ready to forgive all his enemies!

The baron fairly scintillated, for this was his great hour of triumph. Even the dark, immobile face of the Princess Anna was illumined as by some inward light. She had come around the table and kissed the bride-to-be solemnly on the forehead, as though consecrating her to a sacred cause.

Mrs. Davis was radiant, and more inarticulate than ever—which was of small importance since nobody listened to her. Here was the greatest marriage which any American family had ever achieved: there had been dukes and counts, perhaps an earl or two, and in one case the brother of a king (also deposed); but never before a Crown Prince. Her daughter would be the first American girl to sit upon

a throne! No wonder she was overcome, a little hysterical, very warm with excitement and champagne, dabbing her eyes now and then and looking altogether ridiculous. She had never really believed it would happen—Myra was such a strange girl; yet here it was. And she had a vision of Myra sitting on her throne, with an ermine robe and crown of diamonds, very regal, and she herself, considerably thinner than in life, standing a little to one side but very near, also with ermine and brilliants; and diplomats and statesmen in white satin knee breeches coming up to be presented, as she had seen them in a picture of one of Queen Victoria's receptions, and the crowd bowing, very happy and loyal. . . .

The Countess Rémond was also deeply moved, though in a dark and threatening way that puzzled Selden. Her eyes were gleaming exultantly, her lips were drawn back in a smile that was almost a snarl, as she bent her gaze upon Myra Davis, and a spasm of nervous emotion ran across her face from time to time, in spite of her efforts to repress it. There was something bloodthirsty and wolf-like about her, which gave Selden a little shiver of repulsion, for he felt that he was looking at the real woman, with all her veils torn aside, and it seemed almost indecent. She had the veils up in a moment, and was again the calm and smiling woman of the world, but Selden never forgot the shock of that moment's revelation, and any feeling of tenderness he may have had for her died then and there. He felt only that she was a woman to be watched and to be feared.

Young Davis had gone suddenly morose, but that may have been because of his high alcoholic content;

and the look he bent upon his sister had something ironic and mocking in it, as though he alone understood her, and found her far from admirable. Few girls, however, are altogether admirable to their brothers!

Of the whole company, the affianced pair were by far the most composed. The prince had, indeed, kissed the girl's hand at the end of the king's speech, but his demonstration had ended there. As for Myra Davis, except that her eyes were larger and darker than usual, there was no outward evidence that she was in any way excited. Selden wondered where she had gained such self-control.

The dinner came to an end, at last, the bride-to-be was carried away by the other women, Danilo bowing over her hand at the door, and the men were left together to discuss the great event.

It was the king who opened the discussion.

"I trust that you are pleased, M. Selden," he said. "I was hoping that the announcement might be made to-night, but I was not sure. I am very happy that you were present."

"If I am not mistaken," put in the baron, "M. Selden himself had something to do with bringing about the decision."

"Perhaps so," said Selden. "I had no suspicion what it was leading to, but I only said what I thought."

"You said it admirably," commented the baron.

"But I confess," Selden continued, "that I am astonished you should care so much for my opinion. After all, what does it matter?"

The baron glanced at the king, who nodded.

"I have been expecting that question," said the baron, "and I am going to answer it frankly. We have nothing to conceal, therefore let us place all the cards on the table. It is, then, not yet entirely clear ahead. To restore the dynasty—yes, that will not be difficult. But to win the approval of the public opinion of the world, that will not be so easy. This is a day when republics, however inefficient, are in favour, and when kings, however enlightened, are looked at askance. There was a time when public opinion outside of one's own country could be disregarded, but that is so no longer. There is the League of Nations, to which Jeneski sends a delegate; there is the Supreme Council, claiming wide powers as the organ of public opinion. We have witnessed recently the spectacle of a king called back to his country by a majority of his people, and yet likely at any time to lose his throne a second time because the public opinion of the world is against him, and no important country will recognize him. We wish to avoid that mistake."

Selden nodded; it was his own opinion that Constantine would find it very difficult to cling to his throne.

"That our country will be vastly benefited by this restoration I do not for a moment doubt," went on the baron. "You have yourself perceived how deeply this great opportunity appeals to Miss Davis. Nevertheless, we shall have to maintain our position at first against great prejudice. It will be said at once that we have bought our way back to power, our enemies will dig up old scandals and invent

new ones; there will be a bitter campaign against us. Well, we want you on our side. Wait," he added, as Selden made a gesture of negation; "hear me out. What we are asking you to do is this: to observe us, to question us, to dissect our motives, and to report faithfully what you see and learn; to be present at the restoration and to examine our conduct. We do not fear public opinion, monsieur, if it is correctly informed. I am sure that we may count upon you to do so much."

"Why, yes," said Selden; "of course I shall be glad to do that—I should have done that anyway—only . . ."

"Only you must be free to say what you wish—but certainly! What we hope is to convince you, and through you the world—especially England and America. America will have a deep interest in this restoration; there has never before been an American queen."

"We have a convention that they are all queens!" laughed Selden. "But of course there will be tremendous interest in a real one. May I begin asking questions at once?"

"Please ask as many as you wish!"

"How do you propose to accomplish this restoration? Not by force, I hope?"

"Certainly not! We shall first approach Jeneski and his ministers, lay before them our plans for the country, and invite them to withdraw. I am hoping that they will do so. After all, Jeneski is a patriot."

"But should they still foolishly persist?"

"The Assembly is to be elected in March. We will carry the elections and the new Assembly will recall the king."

"You will bribe the electors?"

"Not at all. We will explain to them, as we did to Jeneski and his ministers, our plans for the development and enrichment of the country; we will organize our friends and spend some money in propaganda—yes. But that is legitimate—even in America, I understand."

"Yes," said Selden; "nobody can object to that."

"Do not forget, M. Selden, as I have already pointed out to you, that the king is very popular with his people. He could have appealed to them before this with every hope of success; but before he did so, he wished to be in position to assure their future."

"You are sure that Miss Davis will wish to use her millions in this way?"

"But, yes—have you not yourself seen it? She is on fire at the great opportunity—such as comes to very few women. And there is a certain justice, it seems to me, in the fact that the millions wrung from that mountain of copper by the labour of our young men are to be used for the succour and rejuvenation of their country."

"That is one way of regarding it, certainly," Selden conceded. He glanced at young Davis, who, more morose than ever, was tracing patterns with his glass on the cloth. Had he no interest in his sister's future? Well, there was one question which must be asked, and he himself would ask it. "What about Miss Davis herself—her happiness, her well-

being? Is she going to be just a tool in your hands?"

Davis looked up, his eyes a little bloodshot, an ironical smile upon his lips, as though wondering how Selden could be so silly.

"I thank you for that question, sir," put in the king, with the utmost earnestness. "As for Miss Davis, I charge myself with her. She shall be my daughter. Have no fear. I was entirely serious in what I said just now about the succession. I shall have the necessary papers executed and passed by the Assembly so that, in case of my death, my wishes can be carried out if there is need."

Danilo shrugged his shoulders. After all, he seemed to say, there were many places in the world more amusing than his bleak little capital. And there was Madame Ghita. . . .

The king regarded him sombrely.

"Young people to-day are lacking in reverence," he said, speaking in French. "They have no sense of responsibility. It was not so in my time. I had only nineteen years when my uncle died—Danilo, after whom this young man is named—and I was proclaimed Prince. It was not until fifty years later that the Powers accorded me the title of King. During all that time I had laboured ceaselessly; I had driven pestilence and famine from my country; I had organized an army and defeated the Turk; I had founded a system of education, which still remains the best in the Balkans; I had granted my people a Constitution and an Assembly, and was leading them along the path of self-government.

"Then the war came and without hesitation I chose the side of the Entente against the Turk and

the Prussian. My little country was seized and overrun, my army was captured, everything seemed lost; but in my exile I waited patiently, certain that my allies would win and would restore me to my throne. That would seem to be simple justice, would it not, monsieur?"

Selden nodded. Undoubtedly there was a good deal to be said on the king's side—and the king was an excellent advocate!

"I was aware," went on the king with dignity, "that certain old enemies of mine were seeking to defame me, but I despised them. It is true that my eldest son had married a German woman, but that was nearly forty years ago. It is true that another son took refuge in Vienna and fought with the Austrians, but it was not with my consent—there was nothing I could do. It is a lie that my army surrendered unnecessarily; it was on the verge of starvation. It is a lie that I intrigued against my allies. Nevertheless there were some who believed these lies."

His eyes were flashing and he was pounding the table with his fist.

"What happened, sir, at the end?" Selden asked. "I have heard many stories—I should like to know the true one."

"And you shall, sir," said the king. "I want the world to know it. This is what happened: When we entered the war, some hundreds of our people who had lived in America returned to fight for their country. That was their duty. Nevertheless I salute them for coming back! Many had gone to America because they had some grievance against



me—it is impossible to please every one!—and over there those grievances had magnified. Also some of our young men had gone to Vienna or to Belgrade to study and had brought back with them ideas so dangerous that we were compelled to forbid them the country. These also for the most part had gone to America, and among them there had grown up a sentiment of revolution. They even sent back, from time to time, an emissary to assassinate me. I did not mind that,” the king added with a smile. “It rendered life less dull. But it enraged my people.”

The baron nodded solemnly.

“There were two attempts,” he said; “it was not a thing to jest about.”

“Ah, well,” said the king, with a wave of his hand, “all that was long ago! But these men came back. We could not inquire then as to their sentiments; the times were desperate—we had need of all of them. But they brought their ideas into the army, and, after the surrender, during the long months in the prison camps of Austria, they had the opportunity to propagate their poison. It spread everywhere.

“Then came the end. Austria withdrew her troops for a last stand against Italy; was defeated and surrendered. I was already back in my capital, with Lappo here, striving to restore order, when the prison camps were opened and the army came streaming back. Jeneski, who had been waiting for that moment, met them at the frontier, called together a number of his partisans, declared for a republic, and marched against me. I had no forces to oppose him, and again was driven into exile. In

spite of my representations, he persuaded the conference at Paris to confirm this so-called republic. But he was ill at ease; he knew that I had still some power; and he offered me a huge sum if I would abdicate. I refused. A king cannot abdicate. Only cowards abdicate. And I would not further impoverish my country. No, monsieur, I am still king!"

Majesty—it was a word befitting that memorable figure, which had been buffeted by the storms of eighty years and was still unconquered. There was something epic about it—Homeric—so that one forgot its follies and its sins, and remembered only its gallantry.

"Yes, and my grandson shall be king after me," he went on, with an irate eye upon Danilo; "and after him my great-grandson. Whether they reign or not, that is in the hands of providence; but they shall be kings none the less. For kingship is not a thing that one can lay down at will; it is something that one is born, as one is born a man. It is one's blood."

A certain anxiety might have been discerned in the attentive Lappo's eye. He knew his king—he knew the smallest corner of his mind—and he feared perhaps that he might become too expansive with the warmth of the wine—might go on to Divine Right and heaven-sent prerogative. At any rate he coughed rather markedly.

And the king, who also knew his Lappo, understood. He emptied his glass and rose.

"It is time we joined the ladies," he said.

"One moment, sir," interjected Selden. "I realize

that I am a guest here to-night; I appreciate very deeply the confidence you have shown me and the candour with which you have spoken. I ask you, therefore, how much of this you would wish me to use."

"Why, all of it, my friend!" cried the king. "How little you understand me! All of it!"

"Thank you, sir," said Selden, and glanced at his watch. "In that case, I must be making my adieux."

"Certainly," said the king; "but I count upon seeing you soon again. You wish to speak to me?" he added to Danilo, for the prince, who had grown more and more distraught during this apologia, had risen and come close to his side.

He spoke for a moment earnestly in the king's ear, and again Selden saw overspreading the royal features the same cloud he had noticed once before that evening. Nevertheless the king listened patiently until the prince had finished, then, with an impatient shake of the head, waved him away.

"Come, messieurs," he said, and led the way into the salon.

There was an ugly look in the prince's eyes—the baron stepped to his side and fell behind with him, talking earnestly. . . .

The ladies were seated before a wood fire crackling pleasantly on a wide hearth, and it was at once evident that the Countess Rémond was not only the centre of the scene, but completely dominated it. Mrs. Davis and her daughter sat close on either side of her, and the Princess Anna, her dark face unusually animated, bent above an embroidery-frame

near by. And they were talking very, very confidentially.

The king paused for an instant on the threshold to contemplate this picture, so delightful and domestic, and then, as its occupants started to their feet, came forward with a benignant smile.

"No, no, do not rise," he said, and himself sat down in a great chair which had been placed for him at a corner of the fireplace. "How many old scenes this brings back to me—evenings of long ago—you remember, Anna?—when we sat together around the fire, my family and I. We were very much out of the world, you understand, mesdames, there in that bleak corner of the earth, but at least we could have books and the critiques from Paris and our own lessons in the languages. I even wrote a poem now and then; yes, and a play, which was pronounced not too bad—celebrating one or another of our great patriots and martyrs. For even a small people, M. Selden, may have its great legends! Which reminds me that I must not detain you. M. Selden," he added to the company, "goes to announce to the world the memorable event which has taken place here to-night."

Selden's eyes were on Myra Davis. He knew she would look at him and he wanted to see that look. But when it came it told him nothing. Already, it appeared, she was learning to wear the mask which all queens must wear!

So he made his adieux quickly. Only, when he came to the countess, she held his hand close for an instant and give him a long look, as though seeking

to read his mind; but he was sure that she had not succeeded.

The baron, detaching himself from the prince, accompanied him to the door.

"I shall not see you for a few days," he said. "It is necessary that I go to Paris at once to arrange certain matters. As soon as I return, I will let you know. I shall then be able to tell you more about our plans."

"You are giving me a great scoop," Selden pointed out; "an exclusive piece of news," he added, as the baron stared. "If you wish that I should share it with others . . ."

The baron stopped him with a gesture.

"No, no, no," he protested. "We wish it to be yours only; we shall be very happy if you can win some glory out of it. It will make certain chancelleries sit up, hein? this news? Shall I call a car for you?"

"No, thank you," said Selden; "I prefer to walk," and left him chuckling on the steps.

The great gates were clanged open for him and he passed through into the Promenade des Anglais. The night was soft and warm, with the rising moon painting a path of silver across the sea, and all the world was out to drink its beauty. He would have to go to the main postoffice to get his wire off promptly, and he walked on as rapidly as the crowd permitted.

Yes, the baron was right; this news would upset some of the chancelleries, especially those of other little republics, delicately balanced, not yet sure of existence. How would Jeneski take it? Time had

not been able to dim the impression left upon him by that vivid enthusiast—a dreamer, if there ever was one, with a haunted look, as of a man with something gnawing at his heart; yet not entirely a dreamer—capable, at least, of turning into a man of action when some desperate crisis demanded it, and of giving and taking hard knocks. That hasty meeting at the frontier, that declaration of a republic—he had been a man of action then, and might be again!

Yet, even as he talked with him, Jeneski had seemed too much of another world, and that impression was deepened now. Jeneski's visions were all of toil and conflict, of scaling the heights in search of human brotherhood; but very few people cared to scale heights. By far the most of them preferred to sit quietly at home, before a good fire, with hands folded complacently over a full belly. And that was precisely what the king would offer.

Should he, Selden, help or hinder?

It was too much, perhaps, to say that he could stop it; but the king was right in thinking that no dynasty could now endure unless the public opinion of the world approved. It would be easy to win that approval, there was so much to be said on the king's side. It was only necessary to take him seriously.

And yet he was also singularly open to satire and to irony, as the Viennese had perceived when they built their comic operas about him. He could be painted—and perhaps with equal justice!—either as the patriotic and devoted father of his people, or as a senile survival of the Middle Ages, with a degenerate grandson for his heir.

There was the weak spot in his armour—his Achilles' heel; Danilo, with his amours—with Madame Ghita . . .

But, after all, as the king had said, Danilo could be swept aside—would be swept aside, if necessary. He had the king's word.

Why not, for the present at least, give the king the benefit of the doubt?

And, this point decided, Selden felt his special falling into shape in his brain, so that, when he reached the telegraph office, showed his credentials, and drew the first form from the box, it was ready to his pen.

Half an hour later, with a sigh of relief and satisfaction, he pushed the last sheet in to the impressed attendant, and started to put away his pen. Then, with a little smile, he drew out another form and wrote a hasty message.

"I will pay for this one," he said, and waited until the attendant counted the words.

"This name, monsieur," suggested the attendant, "perhaps you would better spell it."

"J-e-n-e-s-k-i," said Selden; "Jeneski."





### **PART III.—WEDNESDAY**



## CHAPTER XII

### A DAY'S WORK

WELL, it was done, Selden reflected rather grimly next morning, over his coffee.

A telegram from the foreign editor of the *Times* had been brought him with his breakfast congratulating him warmly on his exclusive story and praying him to follow it up.

The *Times*, for all its drum-and-trumpet democracy, was, as he knew quite well, aristocratic and capitalistic at heart, and so was its American namesake with which his services were shared—indeed the latter journal made no especial effort to conceal the fact—and so the kind of stuff he had sent in the night before was exceptionally welcome. It was a sort of oasis in the desert. Presently there would be a ponderous editorial to the effect that staunch and sturdy Britain, with its traditional love of sportsmanship and fair play, was prepared to give even kings a chance!

Nevertheless he realized that his judgment had been considerably clouded the night before. Doubtless on his own quarterdeck, even Captain Kidd might seem a picturesque and downright character, who could cite injustices done him, and could point to atrocities committed by civilized society far more horrible than any of his own; he might even attain a certain merit because of his bold directness, his

straight speaking, his scorn of littleness. He was probably fond of children and a sentimentalist at bottom.

So the king face to face was more impressive than in retrospect; yet, Selden reminded himself, there was a lot to be said for him. The trouble was that there was so little to be said for his grandson.

Though, Selden added to himself, even here he might be unjust. He did not really know Danilo. One thing in his favour was that he did not pose—people could take him or leave him. He was not a coward, and undoubtedly he had his code. Many crown princes had sown abundant wild oats, and yet made excellent kings.

But Selden knew it was none of these things that really troubled him; it was the uneasy feeling that he had been responsible for that quick nod of the head which Myra Davis had given her mother. And that, he told himself, was something he could *not* be responsible for—not, at least, until he was sure she understood exactly everything that nod let her in for. After that, if she wished to keep on nodding, it would be nobody's affair but her own.

Therefore it was his duty to see that she did understand. He must go to her and tell her—tell her very plainly and directly, without palliating phrases. He squirmed a little at the prospect, but there was no other way he could square himself with his conscience. She would probably resent it, and her mother of course would be vastly outraged. But he must risk it.

He had the feeling that the baron had been a little lacking in candour the night before; his opinions

had been asked without any hint of their implications. Yet, as he cast his mind back over what he had said, he did not see where he would have altered it, even if he had known. Nevertheless it was up to him to enlighten Miss Davis very thoroughly on the morals and manners of princes.

He was staring moodily out of the window, turning all this over in his mind, and keeping resolutely submerged a very, very sore spot in his consciousness whose existence he would not even admit, when a knock at the door announced a boy with a salver, on which lay a tiny note.

"I will be on the terrace at eleven," it said, and it was signed "Vera de Rémond."

"There is no answer," he said to the boy, tipped him, and went back to the window. What did he care where the countess would be at eleven! He had not forgotten that moment of revelation the night before when she had looked at Myra Davis like a beast of prey sure of its quarry. There had been in her face a kind of gloating, as though she were revenging herself in some way upon the girl. But that was nonsense. Yet why had she seemed so triumphant? Could the quarry be some one else — Jeneski, Madame Ghita?

The name was uttered at last; he had not been able to keep it back. Yes, there was the sore spot; it was for her he was uneasy, it was she for whom his heart reproached him, it was she whom he wished to protect. . . .

He suddenly made up his mind that he would see the countess. If she really had a secret, he would drag it out of her.


So he arrayed himself rapidly, glad to have something definite to do, and sallied forth into the bright, cool morning.

He had not noticed the time, but as he left the hotel, the big clock over the casino entrance told him that he was early, so he strolled about the camembert, as the little round park just in front of the casino is derisively called, and looked at the people and tried to arrange his thoughts.

The crowd here is astonishingly different from that on the terrace, for these are the people who haunt the public rooms—derelicts, for the most part, poised as it were before the mouth of the dragon, searching for an inspiration before plunging in to stake their last louis; or perhaps with their last louis lost and nothing to do but watch the feverish procession which continually ascends and descends the casino steps, and wonder where another louis could be borrowed or begged or stolen.

It is a motley and sordid crowd, lolling on the benches or loitering uncertainly about: ridiculous old women, wonderfully arrayed in the fabrics of 1860, fondly misinterpreting the astonished glances cast at them; frizzled old men struggling to conceal a bankrupt interior behind a pompous front; cocottes endeavouring to pretend they are not for everybody and at the same time to appear not too difficult; imppecunious gamblers trying to pose as men of affairs, but always betrayed by a loose end somewhere; dowdy old couples to whom the tables have become a habit more devastating than any drug—a new *Comédie Humaine* waiting for another Balzac.

Selden, regarding these people for the hundredth



time with an appreciative eye, wished that he were the Balzac, and sighing a little because he was not, he turned away to the gayer life of the terrace—gayer at least on the surface, fascinating as a whirlpool is fascinating, tempting the onlooker to jump in and be swallowed up, and seductive, as things dangerous and forbidden have been seductive since the days of Eve.

The Countess Rémond possessed those qualities of fascination and intrigue, too—superlatively. He realized it anew as he saw her coming toward him down the steps, her lithe uncorseted body faultlessly clad in a grey tailleur, which, conventional and subdued as it was, seemed somehow exotic as she wore it. Selden thanked his stars that he had gained immunity the night before by that glimpse he had had of her soul; it was very pleasant to know himself out of danger.

"How good of you to come," she said, as he took her hand. And then she looked at him more closely, for her instinct felt the change in him. "Are you annoyed at something? Did it disarrange you to meet me here?"

"No; not at all."

"I shall keep you but a moment. But I felt that I must have a little talk with you before . . ."

"Before . . ." he prompted, as she hesitated.

"Before I begin my day's work. And since the safest place for a confidential conversation is in the midst of a crowd . . ."

"So we are going to have a confidential conversation?" queried Selden, falling into step beside her.

"Yes; on my part, at least. Like the baron, I am going to place all my cards on the table."

"It is what I had been hoping," said Selden, quietly.

She looked at him quickly, smiling a little.

"Yes; I saw in your eyes last night that you were not pleased with me. Perhaps I had had too much champagne. But I am quite recovered from that!"

"So am I," said Selden, grimly. "In fact, I am very sober—I have even some twinges of remorse."

"I was afraid you would have. That is one reason I wanted to see you. We must talk it out."

"Yes, we must," he assented.

She led the way to a seat at the end of the terrace facing the harbour, where they could talk undisturbed.

"Now," she said, "why remorse?"

"Well," began Selden slowly, "you know as well as I do that, while this flood of American money may be a sort of short-cut to prosperity for your little country, in the end it will be disastrous for it, since it brings the old dynasty back."

"No," she said, "I know nothing of the sort."

He looked at her.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"How long do you think the old king has to live?"

"I don't know."

"Well, not long. He has already had two heart attacks."

"Ah, I see what you mean," he murmured; "and after him the republic again?"

"Certainly. My country would never endure



Danilo, nor permit itself to be governed by an American."

"But in that case," he pointed out, "this whole affair is nothing but a piece of sharp practice."

"Against whom?"

"Against the Davises."

"Oh," she said negligently; "they deserve it. I am not concerned about them."

"But I am," he said. "At least I am concerned for Miss Davis."

"You need not be," she assured him, with a flash of the eyes. "She is by no means the ingénue you seem to suppose; she can take care of herself. And she can afford to lose a few millions."

"It isn't the money—I think the country should have some of it; but she ought to know exactly what she is letting herself in for."

"You mean Madame Ghita?"

"Yes."

"Well, why do you not tell her?" she asked mockingly.

"I've about made up my mind that I shall have to," he said dismally. "You see I sort of pushed her into it last night."

She was smiling again as she looked at him.

"And this is the real cause of the remorse?"

"I suppose so."

"How did you push her into it?"

"I was silly enough to say that I really thought she could do a lot of good out there."

"Well—do you not believe it?"

"Of course I believe it. But that isn't the ques-

tion. Dash it all, you know as well as I do what I mean. These women are absolutely ignorant of European ideas—of the ideas of such fellows as Danilo. Mrs. Davis poses as worldly-wise, thoroughly initiated, but she is really as ignorant as a child. She has heard that men have mistresses, that husbands are sometimes unfaithful, and so has her daughter, I suppose. But it is all outside their personal experience. It is always some other woman's husband. It would never occur to either of them that their own husbands could be, or that in this particular instance the husband-to-be is not only unfaithful now, but hasn't the slightest intention of being faithful in the future—that he would laugh at such an idea—that at this moment he is living here with his mistress. . . .”

“But she is not his mistress,” put in the countess quietly.

Selden, halted in mid-career, could only stare. A dozen conjectures flashed through his mind.

“Not his mistress?” he stammered.

“It is Madame Ghita you are talking about, I suppose?”

“Of course.”

“She is his wife—she has a right to the name; I have even the idea that he is faithful to her.”

“His wife!” Selden gasped. “But . . .”

“Married quite regularly in Paris—morganatically, of course. I do not know whether you will think that better or worse.”

Selden, his head in a whirl, did not know himself. But of one thing he was sure—the wrong to Madame Ghita would be far worse than he had fancied.

He tried to explain this to the countess, who listened with an amused smile.

"You remind me of those silly old knights," she said, "who were always riding out to rescue some damsel, without waiting to find out whether she really wanted to be rescued. Don't worry about Madame Ghita. In the first place, she knew perfectly well when she married the prince that he would have to marry again some day for the sake of the dynasty. In the second place, I suspect that the prince is much more in love with her than she is with him. At least, the baron tells me that she is an unusually clever woman, while, as you know, the prince is quite stupid."

"So she can hold him if she wants to?"

"Undoubtedly. And if she wants to, she will stop at nothing."

"Do you know her?" Selden asked.

"No."

"So you don't know . . ."

"Whether she will want to? No—but I am going to find out. I have asked her to lunch with me to-day. That is the first part of my day's work."

"Does Miss Davis know about her?"

"Not yet—at least, I do not think so. But she is going to know."

"You mean you are going to tell her?"

"Yes," said the countess, with a little grimace. "That is the second part of my day's work. I have tea with her and her mother this afternoon."

Selden took off his hat and drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then that lets me out," he said. "I think it's rather sporting of you."

"Do not idealize me nor my motives," protested the countess. "It is a matter of business. Lappo asked me to. We are going to tell her because she is certain now to learn it anyway, and it is far better that she learn it from us than from some malicious newspaper or anonymous letter. It will not be difficult; as the baron puts it, it will be almost as though she were marrying a divorced man. That will not shock her so much."

"No, I suppose not," Selden agreed. "Of course you will swing it!"

"Yes, I think so," agreed the countess with a little smile. "But before I started to try to swing it, I wanted to have this talk with you, so that everything would be quite clear between us. I must know where you stand."

"All right. Cards on the table. Go ahead," and he settled back to listen.

"If Miss Davis has the situation explained to her, so that she knows what she is letting herself in for, as you put it, and still chooses to go ahead with it, you will have no further compunctions on that score, I hope?"

"Certainly not."

"Well," said the countess quietly, "I shall be very much surprised if she does not go on with it. She is neither a child nor a fool—and there is a compelling impulse driving her on."

"Yes—she sees herself the benefactress of an impoverished people."

"The country will have a new saint!" said the

countess with a mocking little laugh. "But perhaps there is still another reason."

"You think the prince attracts her?"

"Oh, no—though she may get to like him. At present, he is just a necessary evil, since for children there must be a father! He has one quality which will appeal to her more and more—he knows how to be discreet."

"Which reminds me," Selden remarked, "that the explosion you expected last night did not take place."

"No—the prince prevented it. It was that made him late."

"He was with her?"

"Yes. He must have promised her something."

"She knows, then?"

"Of course. Lappo has already had a talk with her."

"What did she say to him?"

The countess smiled at remembrance of the baron's face.

"I do not know exactly—except that she spoke of love."

"Ah, you see!"

"But that does not discourage me," went on the countess cheerfully. "On the contrary. Women really in love rarely speak of it. My own impression is that she is determined to make the best bargain she can—and she is right. But I shall have it out with her at lunch—that is, if she comes. She has not yet accepted, but I think she will, if only out of curiosity. There may be some fireworks, but in the end she will agree. I am sure of it."

"Agree to what?" asked Selden.

"Agree to exchange the prince for the annuity which the king is now, for the first time, able to offer her."

Selden made a grimace of distaste. All this was a little too cynical—especially as it touched Madame Ghita.

The countess looked at him, her eyes sparkling with amusement, not entirely free from malice.

"You do not like it?"

"No."

"But if she *does* agree, you will have no compunctions about her either?"

"No—if she really does."

"You do not believe she will?" she asked, looking at him with a gaze suddenly intent, as though for the first time she saw something in his face she had not before suspected. "Well, come to lunch, too, and see for yourself."

Selden stared.

"It is *my* lunch," she explained. "I may ask whom I please. You will enjoy it."

"I'm not so sure of that!"

"Besides, I shall need your moral support," she added, laughingly. "Please come."

"Will Lappo be there?"

"No—he has gone to Paris to arrange the marriage settlement with the Davis solicitor. There will be just us three. If she does not come, we shall be tête-à-tête."

Selden was distinctly conscious that he had no ardour for a tête-à-tête with the Countess Rémond, and, though he did his best to keep it out of his face, she instantly perceived it.

"How American you are!" she said, looking at him with laughing eyes. "No; I am not offended. But do not be afraid. She will come."

"But if she resents my presence . . ."

"She will not. If she does, you can leave before the real discussion begins."

"All right," said Selden, "I'll come. But I don't promise to give you any moral support. You may find me fighting on the other side."

"Then I shall be sure to win!" said the countess, and looked at him with a strange smile. "Now I must be going. The luncheon is at one, in my apartment." She glanced at her watch and sprang to her feet in a sudden panic. "Juste ciel! I must fly! No, you are not to come with me. I am in earnest. Please do not!"

He watched her as she hurried away through the crowd and up the steps toward the casino.

At the top of the steps a burly man was standing, as though keeping an appointment, his eyes on the entrance to the hotel just across the street. The countess approached him swiftly and touched his arm.

As he started round upon her, Selden caught a glimpse of his face. It was Halsey, of the *Journal*.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CLEARING THE GROUND

**W**HAT could be the connection between Halsey and the Countess Rémond, Selden wondered, as he turned away. He tried to remember what he knew of Halsey, but it was not very much. He had met him casually in Paris a number of times, and had dinner with him once at the Cercle Interallié, when they happened to be working on the same story, but that was all.

He had never liked Halsey's style. The *Journal* was a sensational sheet, always seeking to play up the scandalous, never so happy as when it was able to uncover a dark corner in the life of some public man, ever eager to impute unworthy motives to the backers of any cause—and Halsey rather gave the impression that he liked that sort of thing. Certainly he was not held in very high esteem by his associates, and Selden's own idea was that he had lived so long in a cynical circle in Paris that he had caught its tone.

Once he got hold of this affair of the prince and Myra Davis, Selden very well knew what he would make of it—more especially if he discovered the existence of Madame Ghita. But of that he was probably already aware, since the marriage had no doubt been played up by him at the time it occurred.

He wondered if the countess, for some reason of



her own, was keeping Halsey informed. But she could scarcely do that, since Halsey's jeers would imperil the whole plan upon which her heart was so evidently set. Or was she keeping him in order? Or was he just her lover? But Selden could not imagine why such a woman as the countess . . .

And then all thought of Halsey and the countess vanished, for he saw approaching the woman whom, from the first moment he reached the terrace, he had hoped to see; the woman about whom his thoughts were centring more and more; who, in the last half hour, had taken on for him a new interest and a new meaning.

She saw him at the same instant, and turned and spoke a word to the man walking beside her, and Selden, looking at him, perceived it was young Davis, completely immersed in Miss Fayard, who walked on his other side, and who was certainly not unresponsive. In another moment Davis was bringing the ladies toward him.

"Selden," he said, "I want you to meet Madame Ghita. You remember . . ."

"Very well," said Selden; "I am happy indeed to meet madame."

"I also," she said, and gave him her hand with a charming smile. "But let us speak French. To myself I said, who can it be, that man so distinguished whom I have not seen here before, and later I inquired of M. Davis. What he told me made me more than ever curious, so when I saw you just now, I commanded him to present you."

"That was very nice of you," said Selden, making a mental note of that word "later." So the prince

and Davis had kept the appointment, as he had supposed they would do.

Her eyes were resting in his with the same frank and unembarrassed questioning he had noticed the first time he saw her, as though she were seeking to discover what was passing in his mind, what he was at bottom. They were a very dark brown, those eyes, almost black; and again he noted the ivory softness of her skin, innocent of make-up, and singularly glowing in spite of her lack of colour.

"This is my niece, Mlle. Fayard," she added, and Selden bowed to the young girl. "You two may walk on and continue your French lesson, while I talk to M. Selden."

"She is teaching me the first conjugation," Davis explained, looking ridiculously happy. "We have started with *aimer*."

"Allez, allez!" commanded madame, laughing at the blush which overspread the girl's cheek. "With a Frenchman I could not do that," she added, looking after them. "But with an American, yes. Why is it?"

"I don't know," said Selden.

"But you agree with me that it is quite safe?"

"Oh, yes," said Selden; "for the girl, that is."

She laughed outright.

"Are you really such a cynic?" she asked. Then she grew suddenly serious. "Do not be mistaken about her—she is a very good girl, believe me. I have taken good care of her."

"I can see that," said Selden, and they walked on for a moment in silence.

"Are you married?" she asked suddenly. "For-

give me," she added, as he stared a little; "but it is something that a woman always wishes to know about a man. I do not think you are, but I should like to be sure."

"Well, I'm not," said Selden. "A fellow who knocks around the world as I do has no business to be married."

"You travel a great deal?"

"I am always looking for trouble. Whenever there is a row anywhere, I pack my bag and start."

"Was it for trouble you came to Monte Carlo?"

"Oh, no," said Selden. "I came here to get warm, after two months in the Balkans—also to rest a little. And I have had the good fortune to meet here some very interesting people—one superlatively so," and he made her a little bow.

"Thank you. But you have not rested?"

"I usually find some work to do."

"And then, of course, there are the tables."

"Yes."

"And the women."

"Yes—they are wonderful, aren't they?" he countered.

"Not all of them. But the one you were with yesterday seemed to me rather unusual. Who was she?"

"Ah, that," said Selden, calmly, "was the Countess Rémond."

He felt that he had scored, although Madame Ghita certainly did not start. But there was a new expression in her eyes.

"She is an old friend of yours?" she asked.

"No; I met her Monday evening."

"I have never met her," said madame; "but I am going to have lunch with her to-day."

"Are you?" said Selden. "I am very glad. So am I."

This time she did start.

"You are sure it is for to-day that you are asked?" she questioned.

"Oh, yes. She told me that she had invited you, but that you had not as yet accepted."

"So you are in the plot, too," she said slowly, and the eyes with which she scanned his face were quite black. "That is a thing I had not suspected."

"No," answered Selden quickly, "I am not in any plot. But if I were, I should be on your side, madame; I pray you to believe it."

She looked at him yet a moment as though striving to read his very inmost thought. Then she glanced around.

"Let us sit down," she said, and led the way to a bench. "Now you must tell me what you know—everything. In the first place, you know, do you not, that Prince Danilo is my husband?"

"Yes; I know that."

"As legally my husband as the woman you marry will be your wife."

"Yes."

"Except that I have no claim upon his estates or his title, and our children, if we had any, could not succeed to them."

"Yes."

"And there was, of course, the understanding that some day, if he wished, he would be free to make a marriage of state in order to carry on the title."

"Yes."

"Well, the prince does not wish to marry again. If he consents, it is only because the king commands it, and he conceives it to be his duty to his country."

"I can well believe it, madame," said Selden.

"Eh bien, I went to Nice last night to stop it; after all, I have some pride, some rights. I will not be disregarded and cast aside like that!"

"I understand," said Selden. "You are right. Do you need my help?"

She looked at him suddenly, with curious intentness.

"You are in earnest?"

"Absolutely."

She smiled at him, almost tenderly.

"I shall not forget that," she said; "perhaps some day I may even call upon you. But I did not interfere last night because Danilo gave me his word that he would leave the matter in my hands to decide one way or the other, before the settlement is signed."

"That was fine of him!"

"Oh, Danilo is a gentleman," said madame; "and he will keep his word. Besides . . ."

She stopped and shrugged her shoulders, but to Selden the shrug was more eloquent than words. She meant, of course, that Danilo loved her. And she—did she love him? That was the question Selden would have liked to ask, but he did not dare.

"You have not yet made up your mind?" he asked instead.

"No," she answered slowly, looking at him with a queer little smile; "you see there are so many

things to consider. Of course, if Danilo refuses, the king will cast him off—for a time, at least—and there will be no more money. Danilo could never earn any, and he has borrowed all that is possible. So his affection for me would grow less and less day by day—for he is like a cat; he must be comfortable; and at last the day would come when he could endure it no longer, and would tell me good-bye."

"You are saying nothing of yourself," Selden pointed out.

"Oh, I could endure it no more than he!" laughed his companion. "Less perhaps! So it may be the part of wisdom, for his sake and for my sake, to make the best bargain I can, now, while there is a chance. Does that seem very cynical?"

"No; just sensible."

"But one is not supposed to be sensible in affairs of the heart—is it not so? Well, I may not be sensible in this affair—I cannot tell. But I am willing to listen to what they have to say. The Countess Rémond is an emissary from the king, is she not?"

"Yes."

"And she is inviting me to lunch in order to discuss this affair?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," and again she looked at him, with her strange little smile. "What I do not understand is that you also should be there."

"Ah, madame," said Selden quickly, "I pointed out to her that you would not like it. I shall not come."

"But I did not say I did not like it. On the con-

trary, I wish you to come. Only, if you are an ally of the countess, I must be prepared for you."

"I am not an ally of the countess," Selden protested; "not in any sense. I should like to be your ally, madame, if you will have me."

She glanced at him quickly, then turned her head away for a moment, as though looking for her niece and Davis. Then she looked back at him, and her face was very tender.

"Of course I will have you!" she said, her voice a little thick.

Selden was deeply moved; he looked away, out over the sea, and for a moment there was silence between them—but it was a silence which said many things.

"Have you met her," she asked at last, "this Miss Davis?"

"Yes."

"Does she resemble her brother?"

"Oh, no," said Selden; "not in the least. She is much stronger and finer."

"You admire her then?"

"Yes—in a way."

"Is she fond of Danilo?"

"No, I don't think so—not especially."

"Then it is just ambition—ambition to be a queen!"

"Her mother is ambitious, and of course urges her on. But I think what Miss Davis cares for most is the opportunity to do good with her money."

"No, no," said Madame Ghita quickly; "a man might believe that, but not a woman! There is

something beside that—there must be—something more personal, more passionate. I am sure of it. If I could only see her! Well, it may be possible—why not? I would invite her to open her heart to me, as I should open mine to her, and together we would decide. Yes, yes—that would make it easy!”

A donkey-engine which had been unloading coal from a steamer beside the quay gave a shrill shriek with its whistle and abruptly stopped. There came a tinkle of bells from the ships in the harbour.

“Twelve o’clock!” cried Madame Ghita. “Can it be? I must be going! Where are those children? Come, we must look for them.”

The children were discovered not far away, leaning over the balustrade, watching a low Italian destroyer which was steaming rapidly along the coast, and working assiduously at their languages—French for Davis, English for Cicette. They seemed to be progressing very satisfactorily among the tenses of “aimer”—though Cicette found it difficult to get exactly the correct sound of the “o” in love, and Davis thought the way she said it much prettier than the right way—as, indeed, on her lips it was.

Madame Ghita broke in upon them without compunction.

“Come, Cicette,” she said. “Bid adieu to the gentlemen—we must be going. It is very late.”

Selden, looking at her more carefully than he had taken the trouble to do before, found her much less ordinary than she had seemed at first glance. Her face was yet a girl’s, but it gave promise of character as well as beauty. Davis might well do worse!



"But look here," Davis protested, "I won't see you again till evening, then! Why can't I take Cicette to lunch?"

"Impossible!" said madame firmly. "I have her reputation to consider," and she led her charge away.

The two men watched them as they went up the steps—the elder woman so straight, so graceful, so full of ease; the younger fluttering beside her like a butterfly, her feet scarce touching the ground. It was difficult to realize that the actual difference in their ages was probably not more than five or six years, and that the impression of maturity which Madame Ghita gave was due almost wholly to her finish, her ease, her perfect poise. As they passed from sight, Davis took off his hat and wiped his forehead and breathed a deep sigh.

"Is it as bad as that?" inquired Selden, with a smile.

"Oh, I'm in love all right," Davis answered, "and I'm going to marry her—I don't give a damn what anybody says. I've never met a girl who could hold a candle to her."

"Look here," said Selden, "if you can get your mind off that young woman for a minute or two, I'd like to talk to you about something else. What about this engagement between your sister and Danilo?"

"Well, what about it?" asked Davis, a little truculently.

"Does she know about Madame Ghita?"

"I don't know—probably not."

"Don't you think she ought to know?"

"What for? When the prince marries again, Madame Ghita becomes his widow, that's all."

"Perhaps so," assented Selden, scenting the baron's teaching. "Just the same she ought to know there is a widow. It would be squarer."

"Oh, well, I can tell mother," said Davis.

"I think she already knows."

"Well then, it's none of my business," said Davis, impatiently. "And don't you worry about sis; she's perfectly able to take care of herself, and always has been. If you think she would take any advice from her loving brother you're greatly mistaken—she looks down upon me as a kind of insect to be pitied but not respected. Also, if she has made up her mind to marry Danilo, she'll marry him just the same if she knew he had ten widows! See here, though—I'll tell her if you want me to, provided you'll do something for me."

"What is it?" asked Selden.

"Help me to get mother's consent to marry Cicette. I'm of age, and I can marry anybody I want to—but dad never had much confidence in me, and my money is all tied up so I can't touch it. Beastly, I call it. Of course I'd have enough to live on, but if I married Cicette, I'd want to show her the time of her life. Will you?"

Selden looked appraisingly into the pleading face. Perhaps Davis wasn't such a bad sort, after all. The right kind of wife might make a man of him. Even a big brother might do something. Selden had never had a kid brother, and the thought rather appealed to him.

"I won't promise," he said. "I want to look you

both over a bit more first—I haven't spoken two words to Cicette and not many more to you."

Davis must have seen a certain sympathy in Selden's eyes, for he caught his hand and wrung it delightedly.

"All right!" he shouted. "I agree. The more you see of Cicette, the more you will like her. I'm not afraid of that. But you've got to convince mother that she's good enough for me."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that!" Selden retorted. "The only question in my mind is whether you are good enough for her! Now I've got to go," and he left Davis staring after him in delighted amazement.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PLACE AUX DAMES

**S**ELEDEN went up to his room and got ready for lunch with a clearer conscience than he had had since he opened his eyes that morning. At last he knew where he was—he was definitely aligned—not on the king's side, or the prince's side, or Miss Davis's side, or the countess's side, but on Madame Ghita's side. And there, he was quite sure, he would remain until the end, whatever the end might be. Whatever help he could give her was hers to command. Not that she seemed to need any help! Just the same, there he was, and the consciousness of that fact might be some comfort to her.

And as the first step, he decided to be promptly on time, so that Madame Ghita might find him—her ally!—on the spot when she arrived. So, at one o'clock precisely, he was knocking at the door of the countess's suite.

It was opened by a heavy-set woman of middle age, Slav or Italian, discretion personified. Evidently the countess chose her maid not for looks but for qualities more useful, and one glance at this woman confirmed him in the opinion that the countess was a born intriguer.

She took his hat and ushered him into the salon, where the countess joined him in a moment.

"I know you will be greatly disappointed," she said a little maliciously, "but it is not to be a tête-à-tête, after all. Madame Ghita is coming. You see I was right."

"Yes—and I feel like the second at a duel," Selden commented.

"Oh, do not be alarmed," said the countess lightly. "There will be no bloodshed—a few feints at the most. Then she will surrender. What else can she do?"

"I am inclined to think she can upset the whole affair if she wants to—so don't be too confident. And I warn you that my sympathies are entirely on her side."

"I know it," said the countess, looking at him with a strange little smile. "That is one reason I wanted you here."

And before he had a chance to ask her what she meant by that, the maid ushered in Madame Ghita.

More than ever Selden was reminded of the field of honour by the way the two ladies shook hands, each measuring the other, and he breathed a sigh of relief, for it was instantly evident that Madame Ghita had nothing to fear from her antagonist. She was, as always, calm, smiling, perfectly at ease, while there was in the cheeks of the countess an unwonted flush of colour which betrayed a profound excitement.

"It was too good of you to offer me lunch, madame," Madame Ghita was saying. "I have heard so much of you from the prince, my husband."

Certainly, Selden thought, the lady was losing no time, for the last words had been flung at the feet of

the countess like a gage of battle. But the countess chose for the moment to disregard them.

"Yes," she said sweetly, "I had the pleasure of meeting Monsieur le Prince a few nights ago. Permit me to present to you a friend of mine, M. Selden."

"Enchanted," said madame; "it is always a pleasure to meet Americans," and she gave Selden her hand, her eyes shining with amusement, with a quick little pressure of the fingers which recognized him as an ally with a secret between them.

The countess had given a signal to her maid, who drew apart the curtains before an alcove looking down upon the public gardens and disclosed the waiting table.

"Come," she said, and led the way to it, placing Selden on her right and Madame Ghita on her left, facing each other across the centre-piece of feathery mimosa.

"It is delightful here," said Madame Ghita, looking out across the gardens as she drew off her gloves and tucked them back out of the way. "My apartment is on the other side, facing the south, with a little too much sun. Here you have the sun only in the morning. Are you staying in this hotel also, M. Selden?"

"Yes, madame," said Selden, "and my room also faces the south; but I do not complain, for I cannot soak up sun enough after two months in the Balkans."

"You have been in the Balkans? I have never been there. Strange, is it not, when one considers that my husband is prince of a Balkan country. But

he himself has not been there for a long time—through no fault of his,” she added with a smile.

“It appears he will be going back before long,” remarked the countess.

She had nodded to the maid, who served the hors d'œuvres, taking the dishes from a table near the outer door, where the waiters left them—a discreet arrangement, to which she was apparently well accustomed.

“Yes, I have heard that Baron Lappo has another plot in hand,” said Madame Ghita negligently, and glanced at the maid.

“Ah, you can trust Anita,” said the countess quickly, noticing the glance. “For one thing, she is very deaf.”

Madame Ghita laughed.

“Deafness is very convenient sometimes, is it not? And I can see she is discreet. An old family servant, perhaps?”

“She has been with me for a long time,” said the countess. “She has but one fault—a weakness for gambling. In Paris, she wastes her last sou on the races; here the tables take everything.”

“It is a terrible vice,” agreed Madame Ghita. “Have you been having good luck, M. Selden?”

“Really, madame,” said Selden, “I have never played seriously—I lack the gambler’s instinct. When I am winning, I never dare to push my good luck far enough, and when I am losing, I always stop just too soon. I always hear my number come as I leave the table! To my mind, the only way to play is to sit down certain of winning—resolved to win,

or to lose one's last franc in the effort. But I have not the temperament—I am too cautious.”

“Yes,” said Madame Ghita, “it is so my husband plays—and he always loses his last franc.”

Again it seemed to Selden that there was a trace of defiance in the way she uttered those words—“mon mari”—my husband. It was the third time she had used them since she entered the room.

“He does not always lose, madame,” Selden corrected. “I saw him winning the bank's last franc a few nights ago.”

“But by this time the bank has them all back again. I sometimes think it is even worse for a gambler to win than to lose. He is encouraged to go on—to commit new follies. You should be thankful you have not the temperament, M. Selden.”

“And you, madame?” he asked.

“Ah, I too gamble sometimes, it is true, not because I have the temperament but because I have great need to distract my thoughts. What would you, monsieur! Here am I the wife of a prince, but not recognized because I have no money; in a position the most equivocal, knowing that schemes are constantly afoot to marry him to some other woman. Is it strange that I become a little mad sometimes and do foolish things? I tremble myself at the things I think of doing—plan out to the last little detail as I lie awake at night staring at the ceiling. I have been to him a faithful wife—I have been discreet—I have asked nothing—I have worked for his interest whenever I could. And what is my reward? That fat Lappo comes to me and insults me!”



"Surely he did not insult you, madame!" protested the countess.

"Is it not an insult to offer a woman a price for her love?" demanded Madame Ghita. "And such a price!"

"If it is only a question of price," began the countess.

"It is not!" broke in Madame Ghita. "After all, I have my pride! And I have also perhaps more power than they think."

"But you have always known, madame," pointed out the countess, "that some day the prince would marry."

"Yes," said madame; "but if I wish, I will take him away from his wife on his wedding-night, as I did on the night of his betrothal!" and she attacked her *salade* viciously. "Oh, I am not a fool," she went on. "I know what is planned—Danilo confides in me. I know what occurred last night. I had made up my mind to prevent it, but . . ."

"But your better sense prevailed," said the countess. "You said to yourself, since a marriage must take place, it may as well be now as any time, more especially since now it will give the dynasty its throne again, while, in another six months, it will be too late."

"That makes nothing to me!" sniffed Madame Ghita.

"And since it will also give you an annuity," went on the countess, undisturbed, "on which you can live in comfort—luxury even."

"I warn you that luxury is expensive."

"One can live very well," said the countess, "even

in these days, on a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year."

There was a moment's silence. Selden was deeply moved to see a tear roll slowly down Madame Ghita's cheek and splash into her plate. But there was one tear only; she was herself again in a moment.

"Come," she said, "I must understand where I am. Is it Lappo who sent you to me?"

"Yes; he asked me to see you, since he had failed himself."

"I am afraid I was not very polite to the good Lappo," admitted Madame Ghita, "though I am rather fond of him. But I was annoyed that day, and it seemed to me that he took things too much for granted—as though I had nothing to do but to accept whatever he was pleased to allow me. He is in some ways a great man, and I think he even has a certain fondness for me, but . . ."

"He has told me as much," put in the countess.

"But beside this old king of his, this dynasty to which he is a slave, nothing else matters. I am certain he would not hesitate to murder his son, to kill his wife, if he had one, if they stood in its way. He is a fanatic on that subject. It would be a good thing for him if the dynasty perished. There is another thing I do not understand," she went on, more calmly. "Why is M. Selden present at this discussion? Is he a witness?"

Selden, suddenly crimson, started to rise, but Madame Ghita waved him imperatively back into his seat.

"I am not objecting to your presence, monsieur,"

she said quickly. "Pray do not take offence. But I should like to understand it."

"M. Selden is not here of his own choice," explained the countess. "He is here because I asked him to come. As a witness, perhaps; but a witness for you, madame, not for me."

"I do not understand," said Madame Ghita slowly, her eyes full upon Selden's.

"Madame," said the countess, weighing each word and watching its effect, "M. Selden is, as perhaps you do not know, a very great journalist. Unfortunately he has always been an admirer of republics, but the baron has, I think, convinced him that in this case the monarchy can do more for our country than is possible for the present republic. M. Selden's support will mean a great deal to the monarchy, and the baron has laboured hard to get it; but one scruple remained in M. Selden's mind—the fear that you would be wronged too much—that you would not be treated fairly. So I asked him to be present to-day in order that he might see for himself what your feeling is. He has warned me more than once that he is here as your ally."

It was wonderful to see the change which came into Madame Ghita's eyes as this explanation proceeded—the tenderness, the happiness of the look she turned on Selden. And when it was ended, she held out her hand to him across the table.

"You will forgive me, monsieur," she said softly. "I am very proud to have such an ally!"

And whether he raised her hand to his lips, or whether it raised itself, he never knew—but as he kissed those long, delicate fingers, he felt them flut-

ter shyly against his mouth, like the wing of a bird.

"Come," said the countess, who had lost nothing of all this—who had watched it indeed with the satisfaction of a general who sees his plan of battle succeed; "tell me you accept. There is nothing else to be done—your good sense tells you so. What would you gain by making a scene? You might prevent this marriage—though even that is by no means certain. But would that compensate you for ruining the prince, upsetting the dynasty, and condemning yourself to a life of poverty? There will never again be a chance like this. If this is lost, all is lost. You are still young. . . ."

"Yes," said Madame Ghita with a little smile, "so there is no reason why I should lead a life of poverty, unless I choose it."

"That is true; but accept now, and you will have something very few women have—independence. You will be free to look for love—to wait for it!"

For an instant Madame Ghita's eyes rested pensively upon Selden.

"Independence; yes, that is very nice," she said. "But it is a pleasure to be dependent upon a man when one loves him!" Then she looked at the countess curiously. "I am astonished to find you on this side—so eloquent! I had always understood that you were Jeneski's friend."

Selden knew that the countess flushed, though his eyes were on the table. But her hand was in the range of his vision, and he saw that it was trembling.

"That is long since finished," she said, a little

thickly. "The baron is a much older friend—and I am doing what I think best for my country."

"And for me also?" asked Madame Ghita, with a strange smile.

"Yes; for you also. Can you doubt it?"

Again there was a moment's silence. Then Madame Ghita looked across at Selden.

"Come, M. Selden," she said, "since you are my friend and my ally, what do you advise?"

"Ah, madame," protested Selden, with a gesture of helplessness, "how can I advise? I do not know what is in your heart!"

"But if my heart is not concerned?"

"In that case," said Selden, a little coldly, "I should by all means advise you to accept!"

He was looking at her now—at the vivid, mobile mouth with its little mysterious smile; at the eyes curiously intent, as though experience had taught her that she must look into people's minds as they talked in order to get their full meaning. And suddenly she burst into a peal of laughter.

"How serious you are!" she cried. "And how shocked if, by any chance, a woman tells the truth! Come, it is settled! I accept! The prince shall have his little American with her millions, the king shall have his throne again, Lappo shall have his heart's desire, and I—I shall have a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year, and shall be free to look for love! So we shall all be happy! It is understood of course that the hundred and fifty thousand will be mine to do with as I please?"

"But certainly!" said the countess, looking at her curiously. "There are no restrictions."

"And you, Madame la Comtesse, what do you get? A new title? To serve one's country, yes, that is very noble; men have died for their country; but for a woman it is not enough!"

"Ah," said the countess, sombrely, "that is my secret! Perhaps you will know some day!"

Madame Ghita looked at her for a moment with that clear and penetrating gaze; then she pushed back her chair.

"Our business is arranged, then," she said, "and I must be going. I have a niece to look after. I promised her that I would not be long. Madame, I have to thank you for a most delightful luncheon."

"I also," began Selden, but the countess stopped him.

"If you will remain for a moment," she said.

Madame Ghita flashed an ironic glance into Selden's face. What she saw there seemed to amuse her.

"Au revoir, alors," she said, and in a moment she was gone.

"So you see I was right," commented the countess, as the door closed behind her.

"Yes," agreed Selden, a wry smile upon his lips.

"Yes; she is, as you said, a sensible woman!"

"Every woman in her position has to be sensible," the countess pointed out. "She may treat herself to nerves occasionally, but she must never lose her head. And she is right—absolutely right!"

"Oh, of course she is right!" agreed Selden, a little bitterly. "But sometimes it is better to be wrong—gloriously wrong!"

"Do not misjudge her," said the countess quickly.

"She may not be at all sensible in the way you think. It was not because of the money she accepted—I am sure of it. I doubt if she will even use it for herself—you heard her stipulate that she might use it as she pleased."

"Yes," said Selden; "but that would be very—ah—unusual."

"She is an unusual woman. And if she ever loves a man—really loves him—that man will be very fortunate; do you not think so?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed Selden, trying to speak lightly. "I only hope she finds the right one!"

"So do I," said the countess. "I am sure she will!" she added, with a little smile.

She was silent for a moment, looking at Selden's troubled face, as though hesitating whether or not to say something more.

"At least," she went on, at last, "your compunctions in that direction are at an end?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I go to Nice this afternoon, as you know, to see Miss Davis. Then my work will be finished."

"You are going away?"

"Yes; I shall not stay here. But I shall tell you to-night how my mission succeeded."

"To-night?"

"Have you forgotten," she asked, with a smile, "that you invited me to dinner?"

"Pardon me!" he said, confused. So much had happened since that invitation was given! "Of course!"

"At Ciro's," she went on.

"Yes, at Ciro's," he assented.

There was an ironic light in her eyes as she looked at him.

"I can see you are not very keen for it," she said; "but I have a very special reason for wishing to dine with you at Ciro's to-night. So you will be good and take me."

"Why, of course I'll take you," he said, and registered a mental vow to give her the best dinner Ciro's could produce. "I shall be proud to take you!"

"You are very nice, you know," she said, her head a little on one side. "Sometimes I almost regret that you do not care for me—but no, it is better as it is! I am going to see that you are rewarded. Now do not ask any questions!"

"Very well," said Selden. "I will call for you at nine," and he took his leave.

Once in his room, he got into robe and slippers, filled his pipe and threw himself on the chaise-longue. He must reason this thing out—he must find the key to what was in the minds of these two very subtle women.

Why had the countess looked at him so strangely? What was the reward she planned for him?

And what had Madame Ghita meant by "friend"? What was it she had said?

"I thought you were Jeneski's friend."

Why had that long white hand trembled so?



## CHAPTER XV

### THE LIONS ROAR

THE *London Times* does not reach Nice until five o'clock in the evening, but by the middle of the morning a crowd of newspaper men, diplomats and motley adventurers were besieging the gates of the Villa Gloria. As the baron had foreseen, Selden's telegram had caused a considerable flutter at many London breakfast tables.

Lord Curzon, for example, who, heaven knows, is not easily moved from the prearranged and almost godlike tenor of his ways, reached his office ten minutes earlier than usual, wired Paris for a confirmation, and called in his Balkan expert and his financial adviser for a conference that lasted nearly an hour, at the end of which a long telegram of mingled advice and admonition was sent to Jeneski and another to the ambassador at Paris, informing him that the attitude of the British foreign office would be strictly neutral—which meant, of course, that if the king could get back his throne, pay off his debts to Britain and open up some trade, the Empire would have every reason to be gratified.

All the Balkan ambassadors proceeded to warm up the wires between London and their several capitals, most of them sending Selden's article in full in order to avoid the bother of composing something out of their own heads, and then repaired to Lord

Curzon's ante-chamber to inquire what the British government was going to do about it. Lord Curzon, of course, hadn't the slightest intention of telling any one what he was going to do about it, even if he knew himself, but he concealed this fact behind a cryptic manner and a Jove-like demeanour. He gave Jeneski's ambassador an extra minute, on the strength of which that worthy sent a hopeful telegram to his master.

But neither of these telegrams reached Jeneski, nor did the ones from Paris, Brussels and Belgrade, for by the time they had been relayed through to his capital, Jeneski had departed. Nobody knew he had departed, except three of his ministers whom he had called together in the early morning to read a telegram which had just arrived from Nice; the general impression was that he was suffering from a slight cold; but as a matter of fact he was in an airplane flying across the Adriatic.

As Selden had suspected, there was no lack of decision about Jeneski in a critical moment, but even his ministers wondered what he could hope to accomplish at Nice. Two of them were strongly of the opinion that he should stay at home and begin at once to organize his forces; if it got about that he had left the country, the effect would be very bad. The royalists might even attempt a counter-revolution. The third one urged him by all means to go, but it was in the secret hope that he would fall into the Adriatic en route, and the way be opened for the king and the millions he would bring with him. Perhaps Jeneski suspected this, but he started just the same.

The stir in London was not only in the diplomatic doves, for a number of people of no discoverable occupation either sent urgent telegrams in cipher or else suddenly discovered that they needed a rest on the Riviera and booked places on the afternoon boat-train. And, of course, the foreign editor of every newspaper wired his Nice correspondent (or his Paris correspondent, if he had none at Nice) an inquiry, more or less polite, as to how the devil he had come to miss this important piece of news.

During the day, this commotion spread to the continent, and from Paris, Rome, Vienna, Lucerne, hopeful adventurers turned their faces toward Nice, like vultures gathering for a feast, all of them anxious to assist in the restoration of a dynasty so well fortified with real money in the shape of American dollars.

All of which was brought forcibly to Selden's notice about the middle of the afternoon when he was startled out of his thoughts by the ringing of his 'phone.

"Yes—what is it?" he asked.

"'Allo! Is this M. Selden?"

"Yes."

"'Allo! This is the manager."

"Yes; what is it?"

"'Allo! There are some people here to see you, M. Selden."

"Who are they?"

"I do not know who they are, monsieur," said the manager, "but they say they are journalists and that it is necessary they see you at once. I hope there has been no scandal. . . ."

"Reassure yourself," Selden laughed. "Cause them to be sent up to my room, if you please."

Three minutes later there was a bang on his door, which was flung open without further ceremony—as he had been so certain it would be that he had not taken the trouble to rise.

"Hello!" he said, as they rushed upon him, "what's the matter with you fellows, anyway? Why, hello, Scott—I'm mighty glad to see you. I didn't know you were down here," and he shook hands with Paul Scott, of the *Daily News*, the comrade of many a campaign and one of the best-informed men on international affairs in Europe. "Now what's eating you?"

There were perhaps a dozen men in the crowd, and he nodded to the others that he knew.

"You know well enough what's eating us, you damn pirate," said Scott grimly. "Since when have you been the publicity man for that old toreador over at Nice?"

"I haven't tackled that job yet," said Selden; "I'm still working for the *Times*."

"Then why should he send us all over here to see you?"

"Did he do that?"

"Yes, he did just that."

"Maybe he wanted to get rid of you," suggested Selden with a chuckle. "But sit down, Scott. Sit down, the rest of you, if you can find chairs. Now let's have the story."

"My story," said Scott, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead, "is simply this. I came down here partly to get a rest, partly to interview old

Clemenceau when he gets back from India, and I expected to have a few days just to loaf around. But this noon I get a telegram from Lawson asking if I wake or if I sleep, and outlining that beat you put across. After I had cooled off a little, I put on my hat and hunted up the villa where the king lives. There I found these boys kicking their heels outside the gates and discussing a polite little note which the king's secretary had just brought out to the effect that there was nothing to be added to your story of yesterday evening, and that he was very busy and must beg to be excused, but would be happy to see us at six o'clock. He was busy all right—a blind man could see that!" Scott added impartially.

"Busy doing what?" Selden queried.

"Busy receiving all the diplomats in Nice—to say nothing of the shady characters from various down-and-out circles—all the birds of prey along the Riviera."

"He was letting them in?"

"A good many got past the gates. How much farther they got I don't know. Old Buckton, the British consul, came out while I was there, red as a turkey-cock and grinning all over; and our own ineffable Hartley-Belleville, who couldn't have had any possible business there, but has to be in on everything!"

"Well, and then what?" asked Selden.

"Well—some of these fellows represent evening papers, and couldn't wait till six o'clock, and we sent in a round-robin pointing this out. And what do you think old Pietro did? He sent out your address and referred us to you! Fierce, wasn't it? Well, we

swore awhile, and then we tumbled into some cars and rushed over here. Now stand and deliver!"

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"All right," said Selden, and filled his pipe. Scott also fished his out of his pocket.

"May I suggest that monsieur speak in French?" asked one of the French correspondents, who had followed this rapid interchange with the utmost difficulty.

"Is there anybody here who doesn't understand French?" Selden asked.

"No, I guess not," said Scott. "Fire ahead."

So Selden told the story very much as he had told it in his telegram, with perhaps an added detail or two and a little more colour, and they all sat and listened, and the Frenchmen made notes of the unfamiliar American names and asked how they were spelled.

"I always thought you were a democrat," said Scott, when he had finished.

"I am."

"Yet I infer from your tone that you are in favour of letting this old reprobate bribe his way back to power."

"He won't have to do any bribing. When his people know he has some real money to spend on the country, they'll be only too anxious to have him back."

"That may be true—but it is bribery just the same—only wholesale instead of retail."

"It is national interest—self-preservation—exactly what every country is governed by."

"I seem to remember some articles of yours in which you were rather dippy about Jeneski and his new republic."

"Yes; but I didn't foresee this alternative. You know conditions over there, and how much good this money will do. Besides, there is a certain poetic justice in putting it back into the country of the people who earned it."

Scott grunted sceptically.

"Just how many millions are there?"

"I don't know. They ought to be able to find that out in New York."

"How old is the girl?"

"About twenty-three, I should say."

"Where does she live?"

"In Cimiez somewhere—I think the family has a villa."

"Twenty-two Avenue Victoria," piped up one of the Frenchmen. "It is almost impossible to get inside—when one does, it is always the same thing, 'Please go away—not at 'ome!'"

At that moment Selden's telephone rang.

"Excuse me," he said, and picked up the receiver.

"This is Danilo talking," said the prince's voice, when assured that he had Selden on the wire. "The king has requested me to speak with you. All day there have been journalists asking—demanding—to see him. Naturally he does not wish to offend them, and he has therefore promised to see them at six o'clock. He very much wishes you also to be present. He will send a car for you."

"No—I can get over," said Selden. "I shall be very glad to come."

"Thank you," said the prince. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Selden, and glanced at his watch. It was a few minutes after four. "That is all I can tell you fellows now," he said. "It's all I know. Perhaps we shall learn something more at six o'clock."

The men who served evening papers hurried away to get off their stories, hoping to catch the last edition. The others departed more leisurely. Scott remained till the last.

"Look here, old man," he said, when the door was shut, "what do you really think about this affair?"

"I'm willing to give the king a try," said Selden. "Perhaps the war has taught him something. If he doesn't make good, he can always be fired out again."

"It won't be so easy the next time," Scott pointed out. "Besides, it isn't the king—it's Danilo. There is one detail you didn't mention."

"What is it?"

"That he has a morganatic wife. It's perfectly well known in Paris. These fellows are all going to play it up."

"Are they?"

"One of them has even dug up an old picture of her—as a ballet dancer."

"Was she a ballet dancer?"

"Yes—at the Opera. But you don't mean to tell me you didn't know about it?"

"Yes, I knew about it; but look here, Scott—she may have been a ballet dancer—I don't know; but I met her to-day and I found her an extraordinary woman."



"Is she staying here?" Scott inquired.

"Yes; she and a niece."

"H'm!" said Scott, and Selden knew as well as if he had said it, that Scott had made up his mind to find her.

"Interview her by all means, if you can," he said. "You'll see in a minute that it will be an outrage to drag her through the mud."

"I'm not going to drag her through the mud," Scott protested; "but of course I've got to mention the marriage and it can't do any harm to see the lady. I was wondering, though, how that angle of the story will strike them over in America."

"I have stopped wondering how anything will strike them over there!" said Selden.

Scott grinned cheerfully.

"Yes, I know we are not in the League yet. But this marriage story may make a difference. Doesn't it make any difference to you?"

"Not a particle—and it won't make any difference to anybody. Most Americans have been so stuffed with cheap romance and pseudo-memoirs and backstairs gossip—to say nothing of the movies!—that they consider a morganatic wife and two or three mistresses as natural to a prince as—well, as two legs or two arms. He is incomplete without them!"

"Perhaps so," Scott agreed; "but I should think it would make some difference to the girl."

"If I were she, I'd prefer him to have had one wife rather than a dozen mistresses."

"That is one way of looking at it, of course," said Scott slowly; "but as a matter of fact, one

woman is far more dangerous than a dozen. Does she intend to let the prince go?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, in that case, I suppose it's all right," said Scott, and rose. "She *must* be an extraordinary woman. See you at six," and he put on his hat and walked out.

For a long time Selden sat staring at the door. Would Madame Ghita let the prince go? After all, that was not the bargain—she had agreed merely not to make a scene. . . .

Selden took care not to reach the Villa Gloria in advance of six o'clock. He wanted to go in as the others did. But he had taken the precaution to get the king's secretary on the 'phone and to give him certain advice to be passed on to his master. So they found the prince with his grandfather when they were ushered into the salon. Both of them were in the national costume. It was the first time that Selden had seen the prince so attired, and he found him much more attractive than in the ordinary garb of western Europe. The colours suited his dark hair and skin admirably. He even had a little of his grandfather's dignity.

As for the king, no one could have looked more regal; nothing could have surpassed the urbanity of his greeting as he shook hands with the correspondents one by one. There were a lot of them by this time—Italian, French, American, English—among the latter Halsey, returning the king's smile with an expression which seemed to Selden distinctly sardonic. But then Halsey was always sardonic—there

was something wrong inside of him. Perhaps, as the French would say, he listened to himself too much! He caught Selden's eye as he turned away from the king, but made no sign of recognition. Evidently he had cut Selden from his list of acquaintances!

"I am desolated, messieurs," said the king, "that I was not able to receive you earlier, but I have been very much engaged. It has astonished me, the interest awakened by the announcement of my grandson's betrothal. And I have been deeply gratified by the felicitations which I have received."

"Official felicitations, sir?" asked Halsey.

"No," said the king. "Those, of course, must wait upon the formal announcement, which will be issued in a few days. It is delayed only until the date of the wedding is agreed upon."

"The wedding will be soon, no doubt, sir?" inquired one of the Italians.

"As soon as the necessary arrangements can be made. The Baron Lappo, my minister, is already in Paris to that end. I need not tell you gentlemen how gratified I am to be allied to this powerful American family, which will enable us to do so much for our fatherland. Mlle. Davis shares this enthusiasm. I assure you that you will find her, when you meet her, to be everything that a queen should be."

"A queen, sir?" asked Halsey, quickly. "A restoration is planned, then?"

"It is at least envisaged," said the king. "I am going to ask my people to choose, and I have not the slightest doubt what their choice will be. But whether or not we succeed, I am still king, monsieur,

and my grandson will be king after me and his son after him."

"We should like very much to meet the lady," some one suggested.

"I will see if it can be arranged," said the king. "There is one thing more I wish to say to you. It is no secret that some years ago my grandson contracted a morganatic marriage with a young lady in Paris—a lady for whom I have the very highest respect and esteem. This marriage was contracted in the regular way and no attempt was made to conceal it. We are in no way ashamed of it, and I should much regret to see it made the basis of scandal or innuendo. The prince and this lady have been happy together; but the hour has come, foreseen from the beginning, when they must part. It is not an easy thing to do; but they do it with brave hearts for the sake of my country. I find it admirable, this sacrifice; I hope it will appeal to you, mes-sieurs, also, and that you will treat it tenderly."

It could not have been better done; it was evident that, to the Latins at least, the romantic appeal was irresistible. But on Halsey's countenance the sardonic expression grew a little deeper. And the face of the prince was also a study.

Then somebody said something about photographs, and the king summoned his secretary and instructed him to provide them, and then he shook each man by the hand again, and so did the prince, and the interview was over.

"He is a wonder," said Scott, as they went out together, and that seemed to sum up pretty well the impression the king had made on all of them, to

judge by the comments of the crowd. Most of them were of amused admiration at the way the old king managed to carry things off. He was a poseur, yes; he was a mediæval old fossil, yes; but he had always been a friend of the journalist—an inexhaustible source of copy. So why not be kind to him? After all, what did it matter who ruled over the few square miles of barren mountains that constituted his kingdom. They were all a little weary of reformers and patriots—so many of them had proved to be mere wind-bags, or worse! Yes, they would be kind to the king. Even Scott smiled and said, "Oh, well, let's give the old boy a chance!"

Only, Selden noticed, Halsey did not join in this discussion, but hurried away, as soon as he had passed the gates, as though to keep an appointment. Undoubtedly there would be a slashing article in the *Journal*. Halsey had unusual powers of invective when he let himself go.

But perhaps the countess would stop him.

Well, Selden told himself, in either event he did not care. He was only an outsider looking on at the comedy and applauding the bits that appealed to him.

And yet—was that all? Or had he been involved? Had he a stake in the game?

But a ballet dancer . . . a woman who was for sale . . .

## CHAPTER XVI

### AT CIRO'S

**I**T was to Ciro's that Selden had promised to take the countess that evening, and remembering his resolve to give her the best the place had to offer, he drove there, before going to his room, to reserve a corner table and have a word with the head waiter.

He found that worthy, of course, most anxious to oblige, and fertile in suggestion. There had just arrived a shipment of marennes, vitesse, from La Grève; they would be delicious; yes? good, monsieur. For soup, petite marmite, perhaps; no, that would be too heavy; *croûte au pot* would be better; good. For fish, a sole, perhaps, or a trout prepared in a special way; no—one moment; Jean, bring hither that basket of langouste; behold, monsieur, how fresh, how sweet, and not too large; this one; good; for garniture, trust me, monsieur. And then partridges, perhaps, or a wild duck; no—permit me to suggest pauillac, monsieur, pauillac véritable, very young, very tender, truly fed with milk, delicious; with asperges; good. And for entremet monsieur wishes *crêpes susettes*; good. For wine, Martinis first, of course; then a little Sauterne with the oysters; and then what would monsieur prefer? Champagne? No. Bordeaux, Burgundy? Permit me, monsieur, to suggest a Chateauneuf du Pape of

which we are very proud—1915, the great year—and from the special vineyard just above Avignon; good. At nine o'clock? It shall be ready, monsieur. Au revoir, monsieur; merci bien. And Selden went on to the hotel feeling as though he had assisted at a sacrament.

So at nine o'clock, behold him, seated beside the Countess Rémond on the banquette at a corner table—the langouste, with garniture of pink jelly and ornaments of truffles, proudly displayed near by—ready to talk, to listen, to dine, and to observe the world at its gambols.

For *Ciro's* is not only the pleasantest restaurant at Monte Carlo, but the most discreet as well, for there, sitting in view of all the world, one can talk of the most intimate things much more safely than in a private room, with the certainty that one's voice will be lost in the lively medley of dancing feet and music and other voices with which the place is always filled.

And one can dine well, also; though not quite so well, perhaps, as in the old days, for there is a new proprietor. The former one, a handsome, slim Italian who had kept his youth while his wife had lost hers through excessive libations, suddenly quarrelled with her, sold his business and took train to Paris, where he now manages a restaurant, small and very intimate, known only to the elect, two steps from the Avenue de l'Opéra. He is a pleasant fellow, with a record of many conquests; but he goes to see his wife sometimes at the lodging house which she now conducts in the Rue St. Georges, and his two daughters who are very fond of him; and sends

them champagne for their réveillon and their fête days; and the chef he took with him now delights his very discriminating Parisian patrons.

The new proprietor is not as handsome as the old, and his chef lacks that indefinable something which distinguishes the great artist; but he is capable and not without imagination, and it is only by comparison that he suffers. The sommelier is the same, so the cellar is all that could be desired. No one can surpass him at a dry Martini. Selden watched him fill the little glasses, then leaned back with a sigh of content and looked at his companion.

She was uncommonly arresting, with her air of distinction, her eyes a little tilted and fatigued—consummate art again! She had chosen a black gown of some filmy material which foamed up over her breast, accentuating its whiteness and delicate contour and the grace of her arms and shoulders. Her only ornament was again that strange stone of greenish-yellow which matched her eyes. She was by all odds the most interesting woman in the room; the eyes of the other men were wandering toward her constantly—yes, and the eyes of the women, too, but with a different expression.

For whom had she arrayed herself, Selden wondered. He was sure it was not for him, and he looked at the other men, but he knew only one of them. That was old Scott, who was dining by himself at a table across the room. He looked at Selden's companion with marked interest, and bowed elaborately when he caught Selden's eye. But Selden answered only with a curt nod which warned Scott as clearly as anything could to keep away.



Selden had no objection to his meeting Madame Ghita, but there was no reason why he should know the countess.

"Who is your friend?" she inquired, as she drew off her gloves.

"Just a newspaper man."

"Your bow was not very cordial," she commented.

"No—I don't want him interfering with this dinner. I don't want anybody interfering!"

"Nobody is going to interfere," she assured him, and picked up her Martini and touched his glass with hers. "To the fulfilment of all our hopes!" she said, and they drank together. "What happened to you this afternoon?"

"The press has broken loose," he answered, and told her of his adventures with his fellow correspondents and of the interview with the king. "It went off better than I expected," he added. "All the boys are inclined to give the old fellow a boost—all, that is, except your friend Halsey."

She turned upon him quickly.

"Why do you call him my friend?" she demanded.

"Wasn't it Halsey we met on the terrace the other morning?"

"Yes."

"And he was waiting for you this morning also."

"It is true—he is a great nuisance; but he can be useful to me in a certain affair, and so for the moment I tolerate him. That is all."

Selden was certain she was lying, but the marmesses, lying so cool, so fresh, so green on their little shells, demanded his attention. The maître-d'hôtel stood anxiously by until he ate the first one and

beamed triumphantly at his approving nod. Yes, they were delicious.

"One reason I like to dine in a French restaurant," said Selden, "is because every one is so pleased when one finds the food to one's taste. In other countries nobody really cares, you can take the food or leave it; but here it is a matter of life or death; at least, they make it appear so. And they are wiser than we in another way. When a Frenchman enters a restaurant, he puts his affairs, his worries, out of his head; he thinks only that he is to eat; he is smiling and happy; he allows nothing to hurry him, so he enjoys his food and digests it easily. But the American enters in a rush, thinking of his business, or he brings a paper to read, or he gets out his memoranda and makes computations between the courses; so he not only does not enjoy his food, but he does not digest it, and wonders why he has dyspepsia. It is very foolish! Ah, here is the *croûte-au-pot*."

It also was perfect; and then came the serving of the langouste, a solemn ceremony performed by the *maître-d'hôtel* in person, with two of the waiters as acolytes. It was at this point that Selden tasted the *Chateaufort du Pape*, which the *sommelier* had placed reverently before him, and knew definitely that the dinner was a success.

"But you have told me nothing of your adventures," he pointed out. Halsey could rest for a while; perhaps, later on, he might find a way to get back to him. "You saw the Davises?"

"Yes," and she laughed a little. "The family

Davis is having for the first time the experience of being internationally important."

"Do they enjoy it?"

"Oh, yes—at least the mother does, enormously. About the daughter, I am not so sure—she has something at the bottom of her heart—something I do not understand. . . ."

"Yes?" he said, as she paused.

"Ah, well," she said, with sudden vehemence, "what woman has not something at the bottom of her heart—a little worm which gnaws and gnaws!" She checked herself and touched her napkin to her lips. "Do not heed me—it is nothing!"

At that moment came the pauillac—those tender and delicious ribs of milk-fed lamb from the country below Bordeaux—and again the head-waiter beamed at Selden's approving nod.

"But it was amusing," went on the countess; "those journalists camped about the place as at a siege. They have a villa at Cimiez, the Davises—a large place which they have taken furnished. They have picked up their servants where they could, and of course the servants are in no way loyal, but are looking only to make all they can out of the rich Americans. They had orders, those servants, to admit none of the journalists, but first this one and then that one would bribe his way in. But it was of no use. It seems that Baron Lappo had impressed upon Madame Davis that she was not to talk—not a word to any one. He must have hinted at terrible consequences, for she was quite awed, and all she would say was 'Please go away,' over and over again

until the butler would come and lead the journalist away. Indeed, she had rather the air of expecting to be blown up, but she has set her heart upon being the mother of a queen, and nothing will deter her, not even assassination. She has even the idea that it might be well to cement the union doubly by marrying her son to the Princess Anna."

Selden laughed.

"I fancy she will have some difficulty there!"

"Yes, but she is counting upon your assistance."

"My assistance?"

"She is going to ask you to talk to him, since it seems he refuses to listen to her."

"I wonder," said Selden, "if all this could be the baron's idea?"

"But of course—his or the king's. They would like to pluck the family clean."

"Well, young Davis will never marry the Princess Anna."

"Do not be too sure," the countess warned him. "The baron is one of the cleverest men in Europe—a genius at manipulations of this sort. It is true that in this case he has for an opponent a very clever woman. You know very well that I mean Madame Ghita," she went on, in answer to his look, "and that she destines that young man for this girl she calls her niece."

"I have seen the girl," said Selden. "She seems very nice. Is she not her niece?"

The countess shrugged her shoulders.

"How do I know? Cicette Fayard is the name she goes by."

"And she also will pluck him clean?"

"Can you doubt it?" asked the countess, a malicious light in her eyes.

"Well," said Selden, philosophically, "since it seems he is certain to be plucked, why worry? At any rate, he will find the process more amusing at the hands of Mlle. Fayard than at those of the baron and the Princess Anna. It will do him good to get some hard knocks. But what about his sister? Are you free to tell me about your interview?"

"Oh, yes; it is as I thought. She has made up her mind to carry it through. She was not astonished or offended that the prince should have had a mistress. In fact, I think she already knew it."

"You told her straight out?"

"But of course—why should I use *équivoque*? She is not a child. I explained that I was speaking, not because I considered the matter of great importance, but because I wanted her to be treated fairly and to understand everything."

"What did she say?"

"She thanked me, entirely without warmth," said the countess, smiling. "She does not like me—I seem to remind her of some one she dislikes very much. Nor, to be frank, do I like her. It is instinct, I suppose. We find ourselves antagonistic."

Selden decided that it was time to gather his forces for the attack.

"Did you know her, out there in Montana?" he asked.

"I saw her, of course, but only a few times. She was away at school a great deal."

"Last night she was looking at you as though wondering where she had seen you before."

"Yes, I noticed it. But I have changed a great deal from the girl she saw occasionally; and a little care in make-up changes me still more."

"I noted the oriental twist you gave yourself," commented Selden, with a smile.

"I repeated it, of course, this afternoon, so she could not place me."

"And you did not recall yourself to her memory?"

"No," said the countess, and her face darkened.

"I had a special reason for not doing so."

Selden would have liked to know the reason, but the countess did not explain it, and he could scarcely ask. One thing was clear, however—the person Miss Davis disliked very much, and of whom the countess reminded her, was the countess herself.

His attention was distracted for the moment by the solemn ceremonial attending the preparation of the crêpes susettes. This too required the finished touch of the head waiter, for whom an alcohol lamp surmounted by a silver platter had been prepared. He lighted the wicks of the lamp, filled the platter with a sauce over which he had been working, whose basis was fine champagne, and, as it began to simmer, immersed in it one of the thin pancakes which had been brought from the kitchen. He turned the pancake over and over, sprinkled it with powdered sugar, folded and refolded it, gave it a dash of kümmel, powdered it again, and popped it to a plate in the hands of the attendant waiter, who hastened to place it piping hot before the countess.

"Please eat it at once, madame," he implored.

And the countess ate it, while Selden's was in course of preparation. There were three for each of

them—three indescribably delicious morsels, such as only a French chef could conceive.

There had been a little bustle of new arrivals at the door, which Selden was too preoccupied to heed. And then he looked up to find Madame Ghita smiling down at him—that peculiar little smile which always puzzled him. She was perfectly gowned and fully as arresting as the countess—more so, perhaps—though on a different note; and with her were two companions, Miss Fayard and young Davis.

Selden thought for a moment that she was going to stop; but she did not—just nodded to them and drifted past in the wake of the obsequious patron, with the little fish-tail in which her clinging gown terminated sliding noiselessly at her heels, and making her look absurdly like a mermaid, a siren . . .

Selden could not help smiling as he looked after her—the deep spiritual smile with which one regards a masterpiece.

“Yes, she is very striking,” the countess agreed; “and very intelligent; do you not think so?” and she looked at him curiously.

“Of course I think so,” said Selden, with a heartiness a shade artificial.

“She is too good for the prince,” the countess went on. “She should have for her lover a great artist, a poet, a dramatist—a great journalist like yourself; she would arouse him, keep him awake, furnish him with endless themes, and make his future. With the prince her talents are wasted.”

“Perhaps,” Selden suggested with elaborate carelessness, “after this annuity business is settled, and

she has further consolidated her position by marrying that girl to Davis, she will drop the prince and look about her. I certainly hope so."

"Why?" asked the countess quickly, still looking at him.

"Because," Selden explained, "the whole point of the situation is not whether the prince has had a mistress—but mistress isn't the right word. After all, he married her."

"With the left hand," said the countess. "There is a difference."

"Well, the question is not what the prince has done, but what he is going to do. You will remember, she hasn't promised to give him up—only not to make a scene."

Involuntarily he looked across at the other table. Davis and Miss Fayard had their heads together over the menu. Madame Ghita was sitting with folded hands gazing calmly across at Selden and the countess. The latter had looked at her too, and so she knew of course that they were talking about her.

Selden abruptly changed the subject.

"Did you know young Davis's father?" he asked.

"Yes—he came to see my father quite often. They were good friends. He was a very genuine, human man. He and my father and Jeneski used to sit for hours talking about all sorts of things."

"Jeneski also?"

"Yes. He was a sort of deputy for Mr. Davis in keeping the people in order. They were together a great deal."

The waiter had cleared the table and placed the coffee before them. The sommelier, at a nod from



Selden, filled two tiny glasses with golden Benedictine.

"Jeneski is a remarkable man," said Selden slowly. "I found him very fascinating. I should think he would be especially so to women."

"He is," agreed the countess quietly; "the more so because he finds women less fascinating than politics. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Halsey," she added, in another tone.

It was indeed Halsey, who passed on with a curt nod, sat down at a table facing them and ordered coffee and liqueur. And looking at his sardonic face, Selden began to glimpse the countess's motive in insisting on this dinner; she had need of Halsey—she herself had said so—and she was disciplining him when he proved recalcitrant. Well, one thing was certain; he wasn't going to be used as a stalking-horse for Halsey. If he could only fathom the game the countess was playing . . .

"He doesn't seem very happy," he remarked.

"Who?"

Selden nodded in Halsey's direction.

"Oh, he is never happy," said the countess. "He is one of those unfortunate men who never know what they want—or when they do, are afraid to pay the price. Come—I will not sit here with him glaring at me. Besides, I have work to do—my reports to make!"

"To Lappo?"

"Yes."

She was drawing on her gloves nervously. Selden asked for the bill and paid it.

"I also have a telegram to send," he said, as they

went out together. Over his shoulder he saw that Halsey was paying his bill. He glanced at Madame Ghita—she was looking after them with that little ironical smile, which deepened for an instant as she caught his eye.

"M. Selden," said the countess, when they were on the esplanade outside, "I have to thank you for a lovely dinner—but more than that, for consenting to take me. I shall not forget it. Perhaps I can do something for you some day."

"You can do something for me now," said Selden.

"What is it?"

"Persuade Halsey to be decent about this affair of the prince."

"But I do not . . ." She checked herself. "Very well," she said quietly. "I will see what I can do."

They were at the hotel entrance.

"Thank you," Selden said. He did not look over his shoulder, but he was certain that Halsey was not far away. "I am not coming in—I'll go over to the postoffice and get my story off."

"Good night." She held out her hand. "It is nice of you not to ask any questions. And if I do not see you again . . ."

"You are going away?"

"I may be called away very suddenly. So if I do not see you again, remember that I am your friend and wish you good fortune!"

"Thank you," Selden answered. "Good night!"

For an instant she permitted him to retain her hand, then she drew it away and walked quickly up the steps. She waved at him from the top, and was gone.

As he turned the corner, he could not resist glancing back. A heavy figure was running up the steps to the hotel entrance—unmistakably Halsey.

Selden turned, with a sudden impulse, sped back and up the steps into the hotel. He must solve this mystery—at least he must establish beyond a doubt the connection between Halsey and the countess. He raced up the stair and reached the upper corridor just as Halsey paused before the door of the countess's suite. It was evidently ajar, for he walked straight in without knocking, leaving it open behind him.

In an instant Selden was peering through the crack between door and jamb. The countess was taking a telegram from the hand of her maid.

"All right!" said Halsey roughly, as he burst in upon her. "I agree—to anything . . ."

"Wait!" said the countess, without even glancing at him, and ripped open the message with shaking fingers. Her eyes devoured its contents at a glance. Then she turned to him with a strange smile. "So you agree?"

"Yes."

"You swear it?"

"Yes."

"It was time!" she said. "Look at this," and she thrust the sheet of paper beneath his eyes.

Halsey stared at it blankly.

"'Registered parcel wings mailed Nice this morning okrim,'" he read. "What does that mean?"

"It is from Mirko, Jeneski's minister," she said, her whole body quivering, "and it means that Jeneski started for Nice this morning by airplane."

Then, looking past him, she saw the open door.  
"You fool!" she began . . .

But Selden was safely around the turn in the corridor before the door slammed.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A PROMISE

**S**ELDEN left the hotel and made his way down to the terrace. He felt that he had need to collect his thoughts, to arrange his ideas. He walked up and down for a minute or two until the blood stopped pounding in his temples, then sat down on a bench and started to reason it out.

So the countess was in a plot against Jeneski—well, that was nothing new; she had been on Lappo's side avowedly from the first. And that one of Jeneski's ministers should have been corrupted was easy enough to understand. But the bearing of the countess as she read that telegram—her emotion, her fierceness, her passion—had torn a veil from Selden's eyes. She was not in this because of friendship for Lappo, nor because she loved her country—she herself had said it, "For a woman, that is not enough!"—but for some personal reason, deep, compelling, malignant. She hated Jeneski.

But where did Halsey come in? What did he mean when he said, "I agree"? Agree to what? Something he had held out against—something the countess had driven him to. Perhaps it was only to what Selden himself had suggested—to forego the chance for a sensation. His air had been tragic—but that would be a tragedy for Halsey—like cutting off his right hand.

And his reward? Selden shrugged his shoulders.

It was nothing to him what reward the countess might choose to bestow. He cared not at all how many men entered her rooms, nor how long they remained.

Poor old Halsey! He was surely running his head into a noose! She was sure of him now—she had left her door open, knowing that he would follow! She had even made him swear! Heavens, what a fool!

And then a sudden thought stung Selden to his feet. Was Halsey the only fool?

What precipice was it toward which he himself was walking, lured by the vision of a face which grew more vivid with every hour, more dear—a face with calm questioning eyes. . . .

He would have to have it out with himself, the whole question of his relations with this woman—this Madame Ghita—this ballet dancer—this mistress of a prince; what he hoped, what he feared; have it out without evasion or self-deceit. And his face was grim, for he foresaw that he would not emerge with flying colours.

Hope? Pah!

The placid gardien sauntering by was startled to see a man standing by the balustrade suddenly slash viciously at the air with his cane, as though laying it savagely across somebody's back, and he slackened his pace to observe this madman, who had probably lost all his money, and to intervene if need be. Perhaps he designed to cast himself on the railroad tracks below. That must be prevented, because it would cause a scandal, and scandals are frowned upon most heavily at Monte Carlo.

But there was no need of intervention, for the unknown, after a couple of rapid turns up and down the terrace, ran up the steps, and the gardien, following cautiously, saw him turn into the postoffice, and went back to his beat with a shrug of the shoulders. It was not a madman, then; it was only a fool who, instead of killing himself, was telegraphing for more money!

That moment's ebullition had relieved Selden; besides, there was nothing to be gained by beating the air. His immediate job was to get off his special to the *Times*, and during those quick turns up and down the terrace it had taken shape in his mind. First, of course, a paragraph about the sensation which the exclusive announcement in the *Times* had caused; the crowd at the gates of the Villa Gloria; the call made by the Hon. Percy Buckton and its apparently satisfactory result, Mr. Buckton being the British consul at Nice, and acting under instructions from Lord Curzon, as to the character of which, however, he would say nothing; the reception of the correspondents, picturesque old king and scarcely less picturesque grandson, creating most favourable impression; Baron Lappo in Paris arranging the marriage settlement; wedding to be very soon; frantic efforts of the correspondents to see Miss Davis, who had denied herself to everybody, except a personal friend or two; it had, however, been the good fortune of the *Times* correspondent to meet her; here follow with short and complimentary description. And then a discreet paragraph or two about the morganatic marriage, quoting the king and treating it as a thing of the past.

But was it?

That was the crucial question. It was upon that point, in Selden's mind at least, that the ethics of the whole affair hinged. And it was there, he felt, that he must seek some assurance better than the king's. There was only one place to get it; there was only one person who really knew. For the matter lay wholly in the hands of Madame Ghita. It was she who would decide. It was from her that assurance must be sought.

Half an hour later, at the booth in the postoffice, he had completed his special and was about to sign his name, when a sudden thought struck him. Well, why not? And he added this final paragraph:

There is much speculation as to what line Jeneski will take with respect to this affair. No one who knows him believes for a moment that he will sit quietly by and permit the republic for which he has struggled and which he believes in so thoroughly to be overthrown without a contest. He has to face no little opposition at home, even among his own ministers, but he has shown himself before this to be capable of rapid and decisive action in a crisis. There is a persistent rumour here that he left his capital this morning by airplane for Nice. There is no confirmation of this rumour, and no one can imagine what he hopes to accomplish here, but if he is really on his way, his arrival will give a new twist to a situation already absorbing the attention of many chancelleries.

He signed his name, pushed the sheet through the window, waited to be assured that the message had been started, and left the building.

Just across the way the great globes at the entrance to the Sporting Club cast their light along



the street, and Selden, without an instant's hesitation, turned toward them. He was certain that the trio he had seen dining at Ciro's would reach there sooner or later, and he had made up his mind what to do. He was going to demand an answer to the question which was worrying him. He was going to find out definitely what Madame Ghita intended to do.

It was a little early yet for the club, but the rooms were already filled and all the tables were in operation. Selden strolled from one to another looking for his quarry, and he soon discovered Davis and Miss Fayard seated side by side and absorbed in play. Davis was placing thousand-franc notes on adjacent transversales, which gave him a chance on nine numbers out of the thirty-seven, with a double chance on three of them, and seemed on the whole to be winning. His companion was betting more moderately with plaques, or hundred-franc chips, on the carrés, four at a time, which gave her also a chance on nine numbers; but she was less fortunate and her last plaque was finally swept away. Davis pushed some notes over to her and told her to go on, and then he looked up and saw Selden watching from across the table.

"Hello!" he said. "Come over here a minute. I want to see you before you go," he went on, when Selden had worked his way to his side. "I've carried out my part of the bargain."

"Have you?"

"Yes; and now I want you to carry out yours."

"We'll talk it over," Selden agreed. "Where is Madame Ghita?"

"In the buffet, I think. A newspaper fellow got hold of her a while ago. You'd better look them up. I'll join you as soon as I've busted the bank."

"I don't think I can wait that long!" Selden protested, laughingly returning Miss Fayard's greeting, and turned away to the buffet with considerable misgiving.

The instant he passed the door he saw Madame Ghita, and, seated on the banquette beside her, talking away earnestly, was Paul Scott. Selden was conscious of a decided feeling of relief. Old Scott wouldn't do any harm. For some reason he had feared that it was Halsey!

He approached them with a smile. Scott was too absorbed in his talk to notice him, but Madame Ghita had seen him at once, and his heart quickened a little as her smile answered his.

"Good evening, M. Selden," she said; "this is very nice. You will sit down, of course?" and she made room for him on the banquette. "You know Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . ."

"Scott is the villain's name," said Selden, as he sat down. "Yes, I know him—too well, indeed!"

Scott, his discourse brought abruptly to a halt, stared at him in indignation.

"See here, Selden," he said, "don't you know that when a gentleman is talking to a lady, third persons aren't wanted? It is plain that you are not a man of the world! Run along now!"

"I like it very well here," said Selden, settling back in his seat.

"Then my seconds will wait on you in the morning," said Scott fiercely.

"All right—coffee and pistols, eh? Only I'll take my coffee now," and he told a waiter to bring him some.

"Is it that you are rivals?" asked Madame Ghita, who had listened to this interchange in evident alarm.

"Deadly rivals!" said Selden. "More than ever at this moment. I welcome the prospect of ridding myself of him forever! I must say you haven't lost any time," he added to Scott. "Who introduced you?"

"I used your name," explained Scott, with a broad grin. "It worked like a charm."

"My name?"

"It is true," said Madame Ghita, her eyes sparkling, for she was beginning to understand. "In the rooms out yonder, ten minutes since, monsieur introduced himself to me as a friend of yours."

"The infernal impostor!"

"But it is his fault," Scott protested, waving his hands. "Figure to yourself, madame, this afternoon he spoke of you in terms so glowing, so complimentary, that I would have been less than a man if my interest had remained unawakened. I made up my mind to meet you. He even approved."

"I consented," Selden corrected; "I saw I might as well. Now that you have met her, you'd better beat it."

"Beat it?" repeated madame. "What does that mean?"

"I am inviting him to make his adieux," Selden explained.

"I place myself in the hands of madame," said

Scott with a bow. "It shall be for her to choose between us."

"Ah, but that is too difficult," she protested. "Yet you must stay a little while, if only to tell me what M. Selden said of me."

"He said you were an extraordinary and fascinating woman, madame," said Scott, while Selden turned a little crimson; "an opinion in which I fully concur. So when I saw him to-night at *Ciro's* with a lady also of unusual charm, I could only infer that it was you. I did not know that he had turned Turk as well as Royalist. When, upon inquiry, I found that it was not you, I confess that I was shocked."

"Yes, it is true," agreed madame; "I fear that he is very, very inconstant!"

"So I warn you against him, madame," added Scott, rising. "Be on your guard—I even hesitate to leave you alone with him!"

"You are going? But it is not I who am sending you away!"

"No—it is duty compelling me. I have to get off my story of to-day's events."

"Good-bye then," said Madame Ghita, and held out her hand, which Scott raised to his lips most respectfully.

Then he paused for an instant to look quizzically into Selden's eyes.

"You old reprobate!" he snorted. "I see through your game! But it's all right!" he added. "Will you have lunch with me to-morrow? At *Amirauté's*? One o'clock? Good! Till to-morrow, then!"

The two watched him until he passed from sight.

Then Madame Ghita turned to Selden with a smile.

"A most amusing man," she said, "and a very great friend of yours."

"Yes, old Scott is all right; as square as they make them. We have been in some close places together. What was he talking about?"

"He was speaking of you."

"Of me?"

"Of the work you have done and the ideals you have fought for—I was very glad to listen; and how surprised he was to find you on the king's side now; at least not bitterly fighting him—willing to give him this opportunity; and how he was beginning to understand and to take the same view, but that it depended upon me, perhaps, that you should never regret it. And then you came before he had time to explain."

"I will explain, madame," he said, his heart very tender toward old Scott, who knew him so well.

"Then it does depend upon me?"

"Yes, madame; absolutely. When I came into this club to-night," he went on, "it was with the hope of seeing you, for I must talk to you—quite frankly."

"Please do," she said, her eyes shining. "I should love to have you speak to me frankly. And I—I also will be frank. I promise it."

"My regret, if I ever have any," he went on, "will not be for the king nor for his country. The king takes his chance. As for the country, it will be a great help to have this fortune spent there. Afterwards, the people can choose another ruler if they wish."

"My own thought," she nodded.

"My regret will be for the American girl who is involved in all this. She is contracting to place her fortune and perhaps her happiness in the hands of Prince Danilo. But he, too, is contracting something."

"Yes, a marriage; a very serious thing, you would say?"

"It is serious to an American girl, at least, madame. She knows, of course, of the prince's alliance with you. To that she can have no possible reason to object—on the contrary; it has been an honourable and recognized arrangement. But when she marries him, she naturally expects that alliance to cease."

"Ah, well," said madame, pensively, "the prince is casting me off, is he not?"

"Yes; but are you casting him off? You have already told me that it is in your hands. You can keep him, if you choose—no doubt of that! You are the most fascinating woman, madame, that I have ever known, and you are very clever. You can do with a man what you will."

"Even with you?" she asked, and looked into his eyes. "Ah, no—do not lie. You are an American—there is something in you, very deep down, which holds you back from the supreme follies we Latins commit so easily, and which even the English sometimes achieve. I have seen it—how often! You think it a merit; and because of it, at the bottom of your minds, you believe yourselves superior to us of Europe. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps."

"But is it a merit? Is it not rather a cowardice?"

"I do not know, madame," said Selden, humbly. "I suppose we have not the same urge."

"That is it—you have not the same urge. But is that a thing to be proud of—to be more vegetable than we are?"

"But if we are happier so?"

"Happy? Can one be happy without great moments? Yes—as a cow is happy—as a sheep is happy. But for me, that is not happiness—that is ennui! I demand more than that! For me, happiness is to risk everything on one turn of the wheel!"

"Well—you are risking it now," Selden pointed out.

"Oh, no, I am not!" she retorted quickly, and leaned back a little wearily. "I am perhaps willing to risk it, but the stake is too high—the bank refuses to take my bet. Is it that the bank has other bets?" and she looked at him sharply.

"I am just an obtuse American, madame," answered Selden steadily, though his pulses were pounding madly, "and not at all good at guessing riddles."

She looked at him a moment longer; then her eyes softened and a little smile played about her lips.

"You are really very clever, M. Selden," she said; "very, very clever. I knew it the first time I saw you—I looked at you well to make sure. And I

have a great admiration for clever men—I have met, alas, so few! But you were speaking of the prince. Do you wish that I send him away?"

"I think it would be best."

"I am not asking what would be best, but whether you wish it."

"Yes, I do," said Selden brusquely.

He had had no intention of speaking those words, of making that admission, of permitting it to become in the slightest degree a personal matter, but some force stronger than himself drove them to his lips. And he was strangely glad that they were uttered.

She was looking at him with luminous eyes, her parted lips trembling a little . . .

"Very well," she said, softly. "I agree," and she touched his hand lightly with her fingers. "That is finished."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### REVELATIONS

**I** COULD be very angry with you if I wished," said Madame Ghita, presently, "at certain things your attitude has seemed to imply. It is true that I had never promised to give up the prince; but you have appeared to think that I would consent to share him."

Selden was conscious that his cheeks were crimson.

"Madame," he stammered, "madame . . ."

"I am not angry," she said sadly; "only I regret that you do not know me better. Perhaps if you did, you would not have thought that of me."

"Yes, I was a brute," agreed Selden humbly, still hot with shame and contrition. "Can you forgive me?"

"Ah, yes!"

"But at least you will prescribe a penance," he persisted; "a severe one!"

"Shall I?" she smiled at him. "Very well. Hereafter you will be my friend, yes?"

"All my life," he promised. "But that is not a penance—that is a reward."

"Ah, my friend," she said, laughing, "do not be too sure! I can be very exacting, sometimes. So you may find it a penance—a very heavy one—before you have finished!"

"I am proud to take the risk," he said, covering her hand for a moment with his own. "We must pledge this friendship!"

She nodded assent, and a waiter took the order and hurried away.

"What is it you propose to do with young Davis?" asked Selden, after a moment.

"Are you concerned for him also?" inquired Madame Ghita, drily.

"Not in the least—only curious. I suppose you know that they are planning to marry him to the Princess Anna?"

A flame of anger sprang into madame's eyes.

"But he wants too much, that old king!" she cried. "He forgets that there are other people in the world. Well, in this he shall be disappointed!"

"You will marry Davis to Mlle. Fayard, I suppose?"

"It will not be my doing—he loves her."

"Yes, I think he does," Selden agreed.

"And she is a good girl, Cicette; not very clever, perhaps, but more clever than is he. She will make him a good wife. Between us, we will educate him. He is not bad at bottom, but he is very ignorant. It seems impossible that any man should be so ignorant; it is impossible except in America."

"He has never had to learn anything; he has grown up with his eyes shut; he has been spoiled by a mother who is too fond of him."

"Cicette is fond of him, but she will not spoil him—not in that way. He has one great virtue—he is kind hearted and generous."

"Yes," remarked Selden; "too much so, perhaps."

I noticed that he was staking Mlle. Fayard at the table out yonder. That was not wise."

"No, it was not," agreed madame quickly. "I did not know it—I will see that it does not occur again. Every one seeing it would believe that they are lovers. But it is not true—I have taken care of that; and, indeed, he has never suggested such a thing. There is one point in the character of American men which I find truly admirable—which even gives me to marvel," she added. "They are nice to women without demanding anything in return; they will help a girl, just for the pleasure of it, without expecting to be paid in any other way. No other men are like that. And Cicette—she is not silly. Do you know what is her dream? To marry a good man, to settle down, to have many children, and to be faithful to her husband. That is the dream, perhaps, of every woman," she went on, musingly, "but many of us cannot bring ourselves to make the necessary sacrifices. We lack strength of character. Cicette is different. She understands things; she will be very good to him, and she will not expect too much. He will be very happy with her. She will not be exacting. She will guide him, without annoying him."

"Heaven knows he needs guidance!" Selden agreed.

"You will not oppose it, then?" she asked, looking at him anxiously.

"Oppose it? What right have I to oppose it? But I don't even wish to; on the contrary, I have half-promised to intercede for him with his mother."

"That is good of you!" she said, and her eyes were shining again.

"Oh, come!" he protested. "I want to do it! You are absurdly grateful for little things!"

"They have always meant so much to me—the little things!" she said.

"Of course, if I had any sense," he went on roughly, to hide his emotion, "I'd keep out of it, since it is no affair of mine."

"Ah, well," she began, and stopped.

"You were going to say that neither is his sister's future any affair of mine. But it is, in a way, since without knowing it, I helped her to make up her mind; so I want the prince to treat her fairly. Where is the prince to-night?"

"He telephoned that his father is ill."

"Very ill?"

"I do not think so. He has been exerting himself too much. He forgets that he has eighty years."

"He is a wonderful old man," said Selden. "It is a pity he did not pass on his qualities to his grandson."

"Perhaps his great-grandson will inherit them," suggested madame, "and some American ones, as well."

"I confess," said Selden, smiling, "that, absurd as it may sound, something like that has been in my mind."

"How serious you are!" she commented. "Do you plan that far ahead for yourself also?"

"To my great-grandson? Oh, no; I haven't even got to the children yet!"

"But you expect to marry?"

"Some day, perhaps. But not while I am merely a wandering newspaper man. It wouldn't be fair to the woman. Some day, I suppose, I shall settle down. The trouble is I don't want to settle down—not for a long time. You see, I'm like those women you spoke of—not willing to make the necessary sacrifices—without strength of character."

"You have not even a little friend?" she asked, quite simply.

"No. Oh, I don't pose as a saint," he added, hastily. "But I have been tremendously busy and tremendously interested in other things, which have kept my mind occupied. Besides, I am a coward—I'm afraid I'd marry her, if she was very nice to me!"

"There are women who like to wander too—who make good companions on the road."

"I know it, but . . ."

"Confess," she broke in, "the real reason is that you have never been in love."

"Yes," he said soberly, watching the waiter as he filled their glasses. "I am ashamed to confess it, because it proves that I am lacking somewhere—but I suppose that is the real reason." He picked up his glass and touched it to hers. "To our new friendship, which will never grow old!"

"That is the nicest toast I ever drank," she said, and raised her glass to her lips.

"Tell me," he went on, after a moment, "you said something at lunch to-day which puzzled me."

"What was it?"

"You said to the countess that you had always

understood she was Jeneski's friend. What did you mean by that?"

She hesitated.

"Are you very fond of her?"

"I am not fond of her at all."

"Is it true?"

"Quite true. She repels me."

She took a quick little breath.

"All I know is what the prince has told me," she said, "that Jeneski was living with a woman known as the Countess Rémond, whom he had met in America, and who had been married to Lappo's illegitimate son, and that he had had a small estate restored to her."

"She hates Jeneski now," said Selden. "They quarrelled, I suppose."

"Or perhaps he never was her lover—gossip like that starts easily."

"Yes—she said something to me just to-night—what was it? Oh, yes, that he found women less fascinating than politics."

"Well, so do you. So do most men—if not politics, then something else—we are always second to something. But that is as it should be—it is a sign of strength. Life has taught me that."

"I wish you would tell me something about your life," said Selden.

"You really wish it?"

"I have heard so many things . . ."

"Ah, well, you shall know the truth. I should like you to know—though there is really not much to tell. My father was a merchant of lace, a trav-

eller, you understand, selling it to the shops in various towns. One of these shops was at Périgueux, and was managed by a young woman with whom my father fell in love. They married and moved to Paris, where they opened a magasin—not to sell to persons, but to other shops—you understand?”

“What we call a wholesaler.”

“Yes. They did very well and the business grew until it occupied the whole first floor of a building on the Rue de Rivoli near the Chatelet. My mother really managed it, but she found time nevertheless to have two children—two girls. My sister resembled her; but I resembled my father, and he was very fond of me. He still travelled from town to town, taking orders for the business; sometimes he would take me with him. He would wash and dress me in the morning, and comb my hair, and in the evening I would sit at the table with all the men, listening to their talk, and understanding more than they imagined. We were very happy together; but he was a strange man, and once he got an idea into his head, it never left him. For example, he had once lost a parcel through the carelessness of a porter at a railway station, and had made a vow that no porter should touch his baggage in future. So at every stop, he would send the porters away with dreadful insults and stagger along the platform with his great cases of lace on his back, and I would follow very much ashamed, for I could see that people were laughing at him. However it made no difference.

“But those good times did not last. My father

began to gamble, and the habit grew so strong that in the end my mother could scarcely find the money to meet the bills each month. When he came home, there were scenes, terrible scenes, during which he sometimes threw all the dishes into the street. Then he would promise to reform; but always the habit was too much for him; it was like a disease, getting worse and worse. I do not know what happened at the end—I was only fourteen years old—but one evening I went to his room to call him to dinner. I knocked, but he did not answer. I opened the door and saw him sitting in his chair before his desk. I ran to him and threw my arms around him, and he fell over against me. He was dead. He had shot himself."

She stopped for a moment, and passed her hand before her eyes.

"That was the end of the business," she went on. "It was taken away from us to pay the debts—everything was sold. My sister and I were sent to England to a convent school—it was there I got such English as I have—and mother went to work again in a shop. It was very hard for her, but there was nothing else to be done. We were gone three years. When we came back, she had married again, a maître de danse at the Opéra. He was old and very eccentric and all that he wanted of my mother was that she should make a home for him; and she did, a very good one. It was not amusing, but it was better than working in a shop.

"Then came the war, and for a time there was no more dancing, so to amuse himself and keep himself occupied, he gave lessons to me and to my sister.



With my sister he soon stopped and sent her to learn to be a typist; but with me he kept on all day, every day, until I dropped with fatigue—not dancing only, but many other things—how to walk, how to talk, how to acknowledge an introduction, how to hold my fork, how to eat from my spoon—he said the French are pigs because they take their soup from the end of the spoon instead of from the side. He was very clever—a little mad, perhaps. But to him I owe everything.

“He was mad about the drama—but the classics only. Whenever there was a great play at the Comédie or the Odéon, he took me to see it—fortunately he could get tickets, or we should have been ruined. When there was no performance, we spent the evening reading—Racine, Molière, Hugo—I know them all by heart. And then when at last the Opéra opened again, every day he took me with him to rehearsal, and before long I was in the ballet. A year later, the première danseuse fell ill one night and I took her place and did so well that I was given an engagement.

“You know, perhaps, what the life of the stage is—there are no reticences, no privacies. If you have ever been to the Opéra on the night of a ballet, you have noticed that the front row of seats is empty until the ballet is about to begin; then a number of old men come in and take the seats. Most of them have decorations; many of them are famous in art or literature or diplomacy—and each carries an opera-glass. They have come to see the girls—especially the particular girl each of them is protecting; and when the ballet is over, they come back

and watch the girls dress and carry them off to supper somewhere.

"Well, it was from that my step-father protected me. He could not protect me from the knowledge of what was going on, from the loose talk and coarse jests; but at least I remained vierge. It was a greater merit on his part than on mine, for those old men disgusted me, but he could have made a little fortune. Perhaps he had something else in his mind for me—something greater. At any rate, in the end he made my mother come with me to watch over me better than he could, and every night I went home between them. Everybody called them the Dragons.

"And then, one night after I had danced very well, the director brought Danilo back and introduced him to my mother and to me. I thought him very handsome and distinguished. Then my step-father came and they talked together for many minutes, my step-father shaking his head all the time. Finally we went home, and my step-father was very silent all the way.

"After that, the prince came back almost every evening and talked to us, and brought me little gifts of flowers and bon-bons. Once he gave me a ring, but my mother made me return it. He scarcely glanced at the other girls, though they did all they could to attract him; and he had other talks with my step-father. At last one day my step-father took me to his study and bade me sit down.

"'My child,' he said, 'you are twenty-two years old, and it is time you thought of your future. I shall not be able to watch over you much longer, for

some day my weak heart will stop beating, and before that I should like to see you range yourself. This prince, now—what do you think of him?

“‘He is not bad,’ I said, ‘but he is too young.’

“‘You are right, and if it was merely the question of a protector, I would prefer an older man; he would know better how to value you, and you would have the benefit of his experience. But none of those old fellows would marry you.’

“‘Do you mean that the prince will marry me?’ I asked, astonished.

“‘You will not be his wife, exactly,’ said my stepfather, ‘and yet you will be more than his mistress,’ and he explained to me as well as he could what a morganatic marriage is. ‘Some day he will have to marry again for reasons of state, but by that time you will have acquired a knowledge of the world, a certain position, and should be able to look out for yourself. He has not much money, but a prince does not lack money like an ordinary man, for there are always people willing to provide it just for the privilege of being seen with him. It will be a great education for you and I advise you to accept.’

“‘But my dancing,’ I objected.

“‘My child,’ he said, ‘I will speak to you frankly. You are a good dancer, but you will never be a great artist. No—your place is in the world.’

“‘But will his family consent?’ I asked.

“‘Yes. He has caused them many anxieties, and they wish him to settle down with some nice girl until they can find a very wealthy wife for him. That is not possible at present. Of course they will wish to see you. What do you say?’

"What could I say except yes? It was, as my step-father said, a great opportunity—much better than I could have hoped for. A few days later Baron Lappo came to see me. He approved of me, and so the marriage was arranged. Behold the result," and she offered herself with a little gesture, as a showman might offer his wares.

"The result is wholly admirable," said Selden. "Yes, you were right to accept. And your step-father?"

"His heart stopped beating one day as he had foretold," she answered, her lips trembling. "He was the best man I ever knew."

"But your mother is living?"

"Oh, yes; she lives with my sister. My sister married a little bourgeois shopkeeper. They manage the business much better than he could."

"And Mlle. Fayard?"

"She is the daughter of my step-father's younger sister. I promised him to look after her."

Selden looked at her musingly. How far she had already travelled from her humble beginning! How interesting it would be to watch her future—to see what she made of herself, to what heights she rose.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"I am thinking you will go far," he said. "Some day a man will be prime minister because of you, or there will be a great poem, a great play, a great picture of which you were the inspiration; and I shall go to the minister or to the artist and congratulate him, and say, 'Monsieur, I foretold this long ago, one evening at Monte Carlo!'"

Her eyes were shining again and she laid her hand lightly upon his.

"Perhaps you are right, my friend," she said, "but it is not of that I am thinking."

"What are you thinking?"

"That I hope to find love some day," she said, and raised her hand for an instant to her eyes.



## **PART IV.—THURSDAY**





## CHAPTER XIX

### SELDEN TAKES AN INVENTORY

“**I** HOPE to find love some day!”

Those words were in Selden's mind when he went to sleep that night and when he awoke next morning, and he lay for a long time thinking of the woman who had uttered them and of the story she had told him. To find love some day—there was a fit ambition for every human heart! But how often it was pushed aside by greed, by cynicism, by selfishness, by fear—by any number of cold and worldly things!

As it had been with himself. He could not but admit it. Perhaps in some thin and far-off fashion, he still hoped to find love some day; there had been moments haunted by a vision of himself seated cosily before a glowing hearth, and not alone; but somehow, as the years passed, that figure sitting there in slippered ease had grown older and older, grey haired, even a little stiff in the joints from long campaigning. It had remained himself, indeed, but always himself thirty years hence.

For it is not only true that a rolling stone gathers no moss, but wishes to gather none; as time goes on, even grows to fear moss, or anything else that mars the hard smoothness which enables it to keep on rolling.

Selden had been rolling, now, for many years. It was his first assignment to foreign work, to cover one of the Balkan wars, which had enabled him to cast loose his anchors, and he had never been seriously tempted to pick them up again. He had come to love rolling for its own sake. The wandering life of the special writer was congenial to his blood. It was of intense interest, for it enabled him to get past the fire-lines at every holocaust, and it gave him a prestige, a sense of power, impossible to any sedentary job. The thought of being chained to a desk—of being chained even to a house—revolted him. He wanted always to be able to throw his things into a bag and take the road at a moment's notice, without the necessity of explanations to any one, or anything to hold him back.

For a long time he had told himself that it was his career he was jealous of—that nothing should touch that. It should be his task to interpret Europe to America and America to Europe—to labour night and day to bring the peoples of the old and the new worlds to a mutual comprehension and a common interest. But of late, questionings had crept in, whispered doubts. Was he really accomplishing anything, was he really going ahead?

As he lay there that morning thinking it over, taking such inventory of himself as he could, he realized that it was no longer any thought for his career which drove him on, but merely the force of habit. He had reverted to type. The stone had been rolling so long that rolling had become a second nature.

For in spite of the convention which women sedu-

lously foster and even sometimes believe, man is not by nature a domestic animal. He has been partially tamed by centuries of restraint, his spirit has been broken by the manifold burdens laid upon him; for generation after generation, all the pillars of society have struggled to convince him that the greatest blessings he can hope to win in this world are a wife and children and that his highest privilege is to labour to support them; all the forces of law, of civilization, of public opinion, have conspired to hobble, shackle and coerce him. And yet, in spite of everything, he sometimes manages to break loose; while few women suspect what moments of desperation often overwhelm even the meekest father of a family.

Selden had broken loose. Now, at last, he was beginning to wonder whether freedom was worth the price.

As for his career, he had reached its apex. He could go on writing specials, yes; he could go on casting a feeble light into the dark corners of the earth, dissecting the motives of public men, perhaps influencing public opinion a little—a very little; but he would never be any more powerful, any better known, than he was at that moment. Indeed, his influence and his fame must both diminish—imperceptibly for a while perhaps, but none the less surely, for he could not hope that the future would by any possibility bring such opportunities as the past six years had brought. From this point onward his career could be only a descent.

Besides, he was himself growing weary of the game. The world had gone stale, had gone cold and sceptical. The fine enthusiasms, the wide sympa-

thies, the common brotherhood of war days had waned and vanished. And his own enthusiasms had vanished too. He remembered bitterly the ardour with which he had gone to work to combat the traducers of the League of Nations, and with what certainty of success. He had felt sure of his country, of her generous soul, her instinct for right, her jealousy of her honour, and he had never recovered from the shock when she denied the League. It had left him stunned and incredulous.

He had buckled on his armour again and laboured to set her right, but, so far as he could see, with absolutely no result. He had simply wasted his time. The doctrine of world effort, of world helpfulness, of world responsibility, which he had preached with such conviction, had fallen upon deaf or hostile ears. So he preached it no longer. He was worn out.

But what remained? Nothing that seemed to him worth while. Oh, he could still bring some food to Austria's starving children; he could still help or hinder the plans of a petty king; he could still take France's part in her struggle against isolation. But other men could do that just as well as he.

Perhaps it would be better worth while if he could make a woman happy; a woman whom no other man could make happy. . . .

But how imbecile to suppose there was such a woman! And if there were, what had he to offer her? To drag her down with him on his long descent? No—that was a journey which he would make alone!

And at this point he threw off the covers, bounded

out of bed, rang for breakfast, and plunged into his bath, which he made much colder than usual.

He needed bracing. He was getting soft.

After breakfast he settled resolutely to work on the last of his Austrian articles—a summary of the situation, not half so desperate as certain financiers had pictured it, for nothing could deprive Vienna of her position at the very centre of the system along which flowed the trade of central Europe. He kept doggedly at work until it was finished, and as he read it over he decided that it was the best of the lot. At least, he told himself, he had not forgotten how to write!

So it was to a composed and apparently normal Selden that the card of Mr. Charles Wharton Davis was presently handed in, with that young gentleman close behind it. It seemed to Selden, as he greeted him, that his air was unusually subdued.

"You didn't wait for me last night," Davis began, accusingly.

"No—did you finally break the bank?"

"Damn the bank! I want to talk to you seriously."

"All right; fire ahead. But sit down, won't you?"

Davis sat down and looked about the room for a moment, as though trying to find a place to begin.

"I had another talk with mother this morning," he said finally.

"About Miss Fayard?"

"Yes. She got quite violent—says she has other plans for me—that she'll tie up all my money."

"I know," said Selden, smiling. "She wants you to marry the Princess Anna."

"My God!" groaned Davis, his face turning pale with horror. "That—that—why, she's got a moustache, Selden! No; I won't do it! Look here, you've got to help me. I've done my part."

"Suppose you tell me about that first," Selden suggested.

"Oh, it was just as I thought," said Davis, disgustedly. "Sis knew all about it. She fired up and told me to mind my own business. None of my family takes me seriously. Mother thinks this is just a boy and girl affair. It's not—I'm a man and I'm going to be treated as a man!"

"Wait a minute," said Selden; "you're getting ahead of your story. Tell me exactly what you said to your sister."

"I asked her if she knew that Danilo had a morганatic wife, because if she didn't know it, I thought it was my duty to tell her so."

"Yes; and what did she say?"

"She said of course she knew it; that that was all arranged, and that she wished I would attend to my own affairs, which certainly required my attention! I said yes, I knew they did, and that if she wanted to be a real sister to me, she'd help me out—that I'd fallen in love with the sweetest girl on earth . . ."

"Go ahead," Selden encouraged, as Davis paused. "What did she say to that?"

"She said 'Piffle!' or something like that; and then I got mad, and told her that she couldn't fool me—that I had seen through her from the start—all that fol-de-rol about helping that little stinking country out there—when her whole object was just

to get even with Jeneski because he had thrown her over. . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Selden interrupted, sitting bolt upright. "What do you mean by that? Do you mean that Jeneski and your sister were engaged to be married?"

"Oh, no; I was just laying it on a little heavy. But Jeneski and father were always chewing the rag in the library of evenings, and sis used to hang around and pretend she understood, and all she could talk about was Jeneski and the wonderful things he was going to do. She was certainly crazy about him. And then all at once she shut up, and after a while I learned that Jeneski had pulled out for Europe—so I just put two and two together. But I may be all wrong."

"What did your sister say when you made this—er—accusation?"

"Oh," said Davis, with a grin; "the door slammed about then."

Selden sat for a moment looking at him. Could this be the key to Myra Davis's conduct? It fitted certainly, or seemed to—and yet . . .

"So, since I couldn't get any sympathy at home, I came over here," Davis concluded.

"Well, you are not going to get much here," said Selden. "If you want to be treated like a man you've got to act like one, and a man doesn't drink too much champagne whenever he gets the chance, nor fool away his time at a roulette table, nor live off of money somebody else has earned. I think it is a good thing your money is tied up—maybe you will

have to go to work. And I'll never ask your mother to turn it over to you—not till you have proved there is something in you. I *might* ask her to allow you something to live on till you can find a job, and I *might* point out to her that Miss Fayard is a darn sight too good for you, but not till you promise to brace up!"

Davis's face had darkened a little at the beginning of this tirade, but it was radiant before Selden finished.

"I'll do anything you say," he protested. "I know I've been a good deal of a rotter. Just give me a chance!"

"All right," said Selden. "That's exactly what I'm proposing to do."

"Then I'll go tell Cicette it's all settled," and Davis jumped to his feet.

"How do you mean settled?" Selden demanded.

"I'm going to reform, and you're going to see Mother. That's the bargain, isn't it?"

"I'm going to see your mother *after* you have reformed."

"Well, this is after," Davis pointed out with a grin. "I reformed fully five minutes ago. Look here, old man," he went on more seriously, "don't think I'm not eternally grateful—I am."

"Shut up and get out!" Selden ordered. He was beginning really to like the boy.

"Come and have lunch with me," Davis suggested. "Maybe Madame Ghita will let me take Cicette, if you're along."

"Good Lord! I've an engagement for lunch!"



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and Selden jerked out his watch. "I can just make it. Get out of here!"

"All right," said Davis. "But remember, my fate is in your hands!"

Half an hour later, Selden and Scott sat down together at a little table on the terrace of *Amirauté's*, among the olive trees, high above the sea, and attacked a great dish of tiny sole, browned to a crisp and unbelievably sweet and delicate, which Scott had ordered. And after that there were *tournados* garnished with slices of *foie gras*. And finally there was a basket of fruit and nuts—figs from the oases of the Sahara, grapes from Malaga, oranges from Morocco, paper-shelled almonds and walnuts from the Aurès . . .

They had talked of desultory things, of old experiences, during the meal; but with the coffee and cigars, Scott brought the talk abruptly back to the present.

"Anything new about the restoration?" he asked.

"No—except that I heard last night Jeneski is on his way here."

Scott whistled softly.

"What do you suppose he expects to do?"

"Heaven knows."

"He will stir up some excitement, anyway," said Scott. "I met him once—he's an electric sort of fellow; you can almost see the sparks flying when he gets excited. And he will be excited all right—but it seems to me the person to be pitied most in this affair isn't Jeneski or Miss Davis, but Danilo."

"Why do you pity him?"

"Well, if it was me," said Scott slowly, "I wouldn't give up a woman like Madame Ghita—not for any throne on earth. And neither would you," Scott added, looking at him.

"No, I wouldn't," Selden agreed, gazing out across the water; "not if she loved me."

"You mean she doesn't love the prince? Well, I suppose not. She is a very extraordinary woman. She got me to talking about you last night," he added in another tone; "she wanted to know all about you."

"Yes," said Selden; "she told me you had been blowing off. I could see what you were trying to do. I appreciate it, old man."

Scott nodded curtly.

"It is finished, then—her affair with the prince?"

"Yes."

"That's fine!" said Scott, and nodded again. "What are you going to do, now you have finished your Balkan stuff?" he asked, after a moment.

"I don't know. I was thinking about it this morning. The fact is, Scott, I have lost my edge. I'm beginning to go downhill."

"Nonsense!" Scott protested. "Downhill! You make me tired!" But there was a certain anxiety in his eyes as he looked at Selden.

"It is true, though. You know what I have been working for and how I have failed. The League is dead so far as America is concerned."

"I don't believe it."

"Anyway, my people have intimated that I might as well quit writing about it—nobody wants to read that sort of stuff any more, it seems."

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Scott puffed his cigar reflectively for a moment.

"I'm inclined to think you are right, old man, in a certain sense," he said at last. "As a special correspondent, you have reached the summit—you can't go any higher because there is no higher place to go to. But that doesn't mean you are going to give up fighting for the things you believe in. You have a following—I don't think you realize how large it is; and right now is the time for you to strike out for something bigger."

"Such as what?" asked Selden sceptically.

"I haven't thought it out—but what I see at this moment is a great liberal weekly, with you as editor-in-chief and the strongest kind of a staff—the kind you could get together better than any other man I know. I have thought for a long time that the day of the literary monthly—the Scribner, Harper, Century type—is about over, and that the time is ripe for the liberal weekly, dealing in a large way with world affairs and social progress and politics—and art and literature too, of course. I know there are already three or four, but they are all handicapped by some sort of mental bias or astigmatism or spiritual dyspepsia. Now is the time for the real thing. And you are the man to start it."

Selden laughed a little bitterly.

"I didn't know you were such a dreamer, Scott!" he said.

"It isn't a dream."

"Yes, it is. Apart from all question of myself, where is the money to come from? You don't imagine it would be self-supporting?"

"Of course not—not for a long time. It must

have financial backing—the right sort—strong enough to make it independent in every way.”

“But how can a liberal paper hope to get financial backing? How can any paper get financial backing without mortgaging its opinions? It can’t be done.”

“Yes, it can,” said Scott. “At least, I believe it can. There must be one disinterested millionaire somewhere in the world! I’ll take a look for him. Meanwhile, there is another thing you want to do: get married—to the right woman.”

“I suppose you’ve already got her picked out for me,” remarked Selden, with irony.

“As it happens, I have,” said Scott coolly. “I was talking to her last night.”

Selden stared at him, all his blood in his face.

“Do you mean Madame Ghita?” he asked.

“Of course I do,” Scott answered curtly.

“But look here,” Selden stammered, “you’re joking, of course! Do you suppose I’d have the nerve . . . I’m not good enough for her . . . I’m not big enough . . .”

“Of course you’re not,” broke in Scott impatiently. “But that doesn’t matter, if you can make her happy. Think what it would mean to live with a woman like that!”

“Yes,” said Selden, between set teeth; “I have thought . . .”

“And she could make any man big—if she loved him!”

“Ah, yes,” agreed Selden hoarsely, “if she loved him! She couldn’t love me!”

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**"I don't know," retorted Scott; "women do strange things sometimes. Why not ask her?"**

**And he threw away his cigar and called for the bill.**

## CHAPTER XX

### A PHILOSOPHER DISCOURSES

**I**T was not merely, or even principally, to arrange the articles of settlement that the Baron Lappo had gone so hastily to Paris. The terms of the articles had already been agreed upon, after exhaustive debates with Mrs. Davis's solicitor, tentative drafts had been exchanged, and the final one was even then in the baron's hands, with but a minor detail or two needing correction—trivial matters, easily arranged by post.

But the royal exchequer was low—empty, as a matter of fact; and the need of replenishment was so urgent that the baron had excused himself a few minutes after Selden's departure from the betrothal dinner, changed hurriedly into travelling clothes while his valet packed his bag, and had managed to catch the Paris express.

He had reached Paris early the following afternoon, had driven straight to the rooms of a private banker in Rue Lafitte, who, forewarned by wire, was awaiting him, and had at once, as was his habit, placed all his cards on the table. These cards had been examined carefully by a fat gentleman with a black curly beard and a type of countenance unmistakably Hebraic, and had proved so satisfactory that the baron was able to get away at the end of an hour, and to catch Mrs. Davis's solicitor upon his return

from a leisurely lunch. The final details of the settlement were soon agreed upon and arrangements made to have the official copies prepared at once.

He had then spent an hour at the Quai d'Orsay, and another half hour at the British Embassy in Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré; had gone back to Rue Lafitte for a final talk with his banker, and then to the offices of the solicitor in the Avenue de l'Opéra, where the official copies of the agreement were awaiting him, and had arrived at the Gare de Lyon in time to catch the train for Marseilles leaving at 8:50, very tired but triumphant.

It was about the middle of the next afternoon that he stepped out again upon the platform at Nice, entered the car which was awaiting him, and was whirled away to the Villa Gloria, where he found the king recovering from the heart attack of the previous day.

It had been a severe one, brought on, as always, by over-eating. The king was a gourmet, not to say a glutton, with not always the strength to resist temptation. It was one of Baron Lappo's duties to supply this strength. In his absence, the task usually devolved upon the Princess Anna; but she had been ill the day before, and the chef had been so ill-advised as to prepare a rich pillaff of which the king was very fond—with the consequence that for a time he had been very ill indeed.

The baron uttered no reproaches, but there was that in his look which would have made the king blush, if he had not already been so rubicund.

"Do not be cross with me, my old friend," he said. "It is the only pleasure I have left."

"But at this moment," the baron pointed out, "Your Majesty should be very careful. It would be most unfortunate if the impression got about that you are subject to such attacks."

"I am not dead yet," said the king; "though I confess that for a time I was uncertain about it. You have the papers?"

"They are here," and the baron spread them out. "Everything is as we wished."

"What are the exact figures?" asked the king.

"The estate, when all the debts had been settled and the taxes paid, amounted to seventy-five millions. Of this a third was left to the daughter, a third to the son, and a third to the wife, the wife's share to be held in trust, after her death, for any grandchildren. The son's share is also in trust; the daughter's is to be paid over to her upon her marriage, but must remain her property, not her husband's."

"We cannot object to that," said the king. "She will have, then, how much?"

"About twenty-five million dollars, Sire."

"That is how much in the currency of our country?"

"At present rates, nearly three billions."

"Ah," said the king thoughtfully, "what cannot be done with such a sum! Half of it will suffice!"

"That is also my opinion," said the baron.

"And the remainder can be put aside as a foundation for our house. If we could get the boy also . . ."

"His money will never be really his—it is held in trust for his children."



"Magnificent!" said the king. "It would make our house the richest in Europe. Yes, we must arrange it. But meanwhile, my good Lappo, as you know, we have nothing. Did you see Hirsch?"

"Yes, Sire; and he is willing to make a loan—three hundred thousand francs, to be repaid one month after the marriage. The terms," added the baron, "are rather stiff."

"No matter," said the king, who was used to stiff terms. "When can we get the money?"

"I have arranged for the notary and an official of Hirsch's bank to come this evening, prepared to pay it over after Your Majesty and Danilo have signed the necessary papers. Danilo must not fail to be present."

"Good," said the king; "I will attend to that. This does more to cure me than all the doctors," he added. "There is no illness so annoying as lack of money! And the settlement—that also must be signed without delay."

"I had thought of to-morrow morning," said the baron.

"Very well," agreed the king; "you will make the arrangements."

"I have also to report," said the baron, "an attitude of benevolent neutrality on the part of the French and British governments. They have no disposition to interfere, so long as there is no bloodshed. Italy, of course, we can count on. Our success, therefore, seems assured, unless the prince . . ."

"Do not worry about Danilo," said the king.

"He will do as I tell him—he knows his duty. You have provided for his wife?"

"I have caused an offer to be made her."

"By whom?"

"By the Countess Rémond."

"Ah, yes," said the king reflectively. "You think you can trust her?"

"Absolutely, Sire. She has reasons to be grateful to me—and to hate Jeneski."

"You are right not to count too much upon gratitude," said the king; "but hate—yes, that is better. She is a clever woman. We must not forget her," and he turned to the papers on his desk.

The baron retired to his cabinet to look through his mail, and there he found the report from the countess of her interview with Madame Ghita, and of her acceptance. But it contained no reference to the receipt of the telegram from Goritzza heralding Jeneski's arrival.

The baron read the report attentively, especially a long postscript in which Selden's name occurred, and nodded approval once or twice. Then he ordered his car, made a careful toilet and presently sallied forth to call upon Mrs. Davis in her villa at Cimiez; and, after a most satisfactory conversation with her, directed his chauffeur to proceed by the coast road to Monte Carlo.

Selden had declined Scott's proffer of a lift back to his hotel.

"No, I'll walk," he said. "It will do me good."

The moment had come when he must arrange his future—when he must decide what he was going to

do. He felt that he must be alone, that he could not meet any of the actors in the drama—certainly not Madame Ghita—until that decision had been reached. And he was the prey of many and violent emotions, for he began to perceive that the decision might not rest wholly in his hands. Scott was a fool, of course, in thinking there was any chance for him; but at least he must make up his mind whether he should try to win her or whether he should flee.

It was evident that his only sure safety lay in flight; he could no longer trust himself; and he told himself again and again that he was a fool to hesitate. Yet to flee from such a woman—wasn't that more foolish still? The thought of life with her turned him giddy, set his blood on fire . . .

But how could he support her? There was no admiring public ready to pay for the privilege of dining with a newspaper man! Even if he had been willing to accept life on such terms. And she would have to renounce the king's bounty, for it was equally impossible for him to live on money acquired as that would be. But what right had he to ask her to do that? What had he to offer in return? No, he couldn't do it! He must go away!

And then the memory of her eyes, of her voice, rent him anew. He was in love! He! In love!

He stood away and looked at himself with a sneer. What a pitiable object he had become!

Yes, he must go away—at once.

When he finally got back to his room, he hauled out his bag and began to pack—slowly, with long periods of abstraction.

It was thus the baron found him. It needed but

a glance at Selden's tortured face to tell that astute old student of human nature what was amiss.

"Yes, I am back, you see," he said, as he took the proffered chair. "Everything is arranged, and I have come to ask you to do Madame Davis and myself one more favour. I have no shame—I am always asking!"

"What is the favour?"

"The articles of settlement are to be signed tomorrow morning. Mrs. Davis would consider it a very great favour, and so should I, if you would sign as a witness in her behalf."

Selden hesitated.

"There is nothing in the terms of the settlement to which you could object," went on the baron. "The entire fortune of Miss Davis remains absolutely in her hands. The prince gets nothing, except a small annuity. We preferred it so. We hope, of course, that she will choose to use a portion of her fortune to rehabilitate our country—which will be her country also—but the bulk of it will be conserved for the benefit of her children."

Still Selden hesitated.

"Come," said the baron, "tell me frankly what is in your thought."

"I am wondering," said Selden, "whether Miss Davis will be happy. It is evident that she is not in love."

"Not, at least, with the prince," supplemented the baron.

"What do you mean?"

"I may be wrong," said the baron, "because I do not understand your women; but I have observed

Miss Davis as carefully as I could—naturally, since I had need to do so!—and I have become more and more convinced that somewhere in her life there has been an unhappy love affair, from which she has never quite recovered. That happens, does it not, even to American girls?”

“Yes, of course,” said Selden.

“I admit it does not seem probable, but it is the only explanation I can find of a thing which has appeared to me very strange. For the only question she has asked herself, apparently, about this marriage is not whether she would be happy, but whether she would be useful.”

“Yes,” said Selden again; “she asked me just that.”

“Not for a moment, so far as I could see, has she thought of love. That, I confess, seemed to me unnatural; though perhaps American girls do not think of love,” and the baron shrugged his shoulders helplessly. “Or perhaps they are ashamed of it. I do not know. As for happiness—are your American marriages always happy?”

“No, not always,” Selden admitted with a smile.

“I have never seen one that appeared so,” said the baron; “not as a French marriage is very often happy. To me, American husbands and wives seem merely bored with each other. Why should two people stay together when they would be happier apart?”

“You see only the worst ones over here; and a lot of people are held together by habit, by fear of ridicule or loss of position. We are cowards in that respect.”

"Yes; we are not like that. For one thing, our women try to keep themselves interesting to their men, and they are not ashamed of love. They do not consider a husband merely a source of funds—a bank. Very often they manage his affairs for him, and better than he could. The attitude of the husband, too, is different. With you, women are an ornament; with us, they are a passion."

"Too much so, perhaps," commented Selden.

"It may be; yes, no doubt our men are less faithful than yours, but they are also less cruel. They do not outlaw a woman because she has had a lover; they do not regard her as therefore ruined. It was Dumas—was it not?—who pointed out that a woman's virginity belongs, not to the first man who possesses her, but to the first man she truly loves, to whom for the first time she really surrenders—for it is to him only she gives everything. Well, our men believe that."

"Yes," said Selden in a low voice; "yes . . ."

"And after all," went on the baron, lighting a cigarette, "it is a much greater compliment to a man—a much more difficult thing to achieve—to be a woman's last lover than it is to be her first one. To be a woman's first lover—that is nothing; she is curious, she wishes to know what love is, she has not perfected her defence. A man needs only to be a little good-looking and not too stupid. But to be her last one, that is different. To emerge victorious from the comparisons that she makes, to impress her as no one else has done, to awaken something in her that no one else has been able to awaken, to cause her to say to herself, 'I will seek no further—I am

content! I love him!' To accomplish that, a man must be very clever, very intelligent. It is a triumph. There is no higher tribute."

"Perhaps it is a tribute Miss Davis will pay the prince," suggested Selden, with a smile.

"I was not thinking of Miss Davis," said the baron; "but it is possible. The prince is not without brains. At least, I trust she will be happy as well as useful. I give you my word, as a man of honour, that I shall do everything in my power to make her so."

"I am sure of it," said Selden; "and I shall be glad to be present to-morrow morning as Mrs. Davis's witness."

"Thank you," said the baron. "At eleven."

He made a little motion as if to rise, then, glancing again at Selden's face, lighted another cigarette and settled back in his chair.

"Tell me about yourself," he said. "What has been going on here?"

"Nothing has been going on. I have been doing a little work—and annoying myself a great deal."

"Annoying yourself? About what, if I may ask?"

"About my future."

"Ah!" said the baron. "Does it not please you—your future?"

"As a matter of fact," answered Selden, with a crooked grin, "I have suddenly discovered that my future is behind me."

The baron took a long puff of his cigarette and exhaled the smoke slowly.

"Your Americanisms sometimes puzzle me," he said. "What you mean, I suppose, is that you do

not at this moment see ahead of you any work which seems as important as that which you have already done."

"Not at this moment, or any moment. Worse still, I am beginning to despair of human nature; I . . . ."

"But you are wrong—very wrong," broke in the baron. "Here am I, with at least twice your age, my whole life spent in the most cynical of all professions, and my admiration for human nature grows stronger and stronger, day by day. I listen to the pessimists with a smile—the prophets of evil do not frighten me. I grant all their contentions: that man is naturally evil, that he has used such glimmering light of reason as he may possess only to become more bestial than the beasts, that five thousand years of civilization have culminated in five years of atrocity, fiendishness and insanity; yes, but in the midst of it all, in the very worst of it, there were flashes of splendour—flashes of kindliness, and courage and self-sacrifice. There is something of that in all of us—and that is the miracle. It should not astonish us that men are full of ignorance and vice, but that they are capable of the heroisms they sometimes attain. You have been looking at the wrong side of the shield, my friend."

"Perhaps I have," agreed Selden, in a low voice.

"Well, turn it over," said the baron. He paused a moment, evidently in doubt whether to go on. "I am an old man," he continued at last, "and I have seen a great deal of life; also I esteem you very highly—so you will permit me to say something which in another might seem an impertinence. It is



this: do not fear to seize happiness when it comes your way; do not hesitate, or draw back, or run away. It is a rare thing, happiness—a very rare and fleeting thing; even at best, we can only hope to taste it briefly now and then. How silly, how cowardly to permit a single moment of it to escape! That,” he added, “is all I have learned in the sixty years that I have been on earth. But many men do not learn even that—not until it is too late!”

He sat for a moment longer looking at Selden with his wise old eyes; then he rose abruptly.

“Good-bye, my friend,” he said. “Till to-morrow—at eleven.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE UNLIT LAMP

**I**T was a decidedly nervous and shaken Selden who dressed for dinner that evening. For the first time in his life he had committed what is for a journalist the unpardonable sin—he had permitted his feelings to become involved in an affair which he had set himself to watch from the outside. He had ceased to be an observer and had become a participant.

Yet permitted was scarcely the word, for he seemed to have had no volition in the matter. He had been drawn in against his will. But, he told himself grimly, it was because his struggles to escape had been half-hearted. He might have saved himself had he heeded the first signals of danger. It was his cursed inability to make up his mind that had brought him to his present pass. He had dabbled with temptation—and now it was too late: the whirlpool had him!

No; that was not true either. Let him at least be man enough to be candid with himself: he could escape, even now, if he really wanted to. He had only to finish packing his bag, go to the station, get aboard the first train, and permit it to carry him away. But that was such a cowardly thing to do.

"Oh, own up, you idiot!" he groaned between his teeth. "It's not because it is cowardly you don't do it! Own up! It's because you don't want to escape!"

And, staring at himself in the glass, he realized that this was the truth—he had got down to it at last. He didn't want to escape. It was finished. He might still struggle a little in an instinctive sort of way, but unless some power outside himself seized him and threw him clear . . .

Yes, and in that event he had the horrid consciousness that he would fight with all his strength against that power!

"What is it I am afraid of?" he asked himself. "The baron is right. A man is a fool not to seize happiness when it comes his way!"

If he could only have happiness without capitulation! If he could have love fighting at his side for some great ideal! That were to be blessed indeed. But if love should drag him down—well, even then, he would have love!

Why had the baron talked to him like that? Was it, perhaps, that he had some inkling . . . And old Scott, too . . .

The sharp ringing of his telephone bell startled him out of his thoughts.

"This is Davis," said the voice at the other end. "What are you doing to-night?"

"Nothing in particular," Selden answered; the only thing he had definitely planned was to go to the club in the hope of finding Madame Ghita there.

"Then come up and have dinner with us."

"Who is 'us'?"

"Madame Ghita, Miss Fayard and myself. We are having a dinner to celebrate a very special event—one in which you are particularly interested."

"Where is the prince?" asked Selden.

"He can't come until later—he just telephoned us not to wait for him—he has to sign some papers of some sort. Three would be deadly, and madame suggested that I ask you."

Selden's heart was beating like a drum. It was the Rubicon.

"Where is the dinner?" he asked, in a voice muffled by emotion.

"In madame's apartment, here in the hotel—third floor. Will you come?"

"Please come, M. Selden!" said madame's voice softly.

It was all over—he took the plunge.

"Of course I will come," he said. "Thank madame for me."

"Oh, you can thank her yourself," said Davis, with a chuckle. "We will give you fifteen minutes."

"All right," Selden agreed, and placed the receiver back on its rack.

He gave a last critical look at himself, retied his tie, then caught up coat and hat, descended to the lobby and hurried out to the florist's at the corner, where he bought two preposterously expensive bunches of roses. He paid for them with a thrill of satisfaction—for the first time in his life he was being foolish; he had cut loose from the moorings of common-sense; he had let himself go!

Flowers in hand, he hurried back to the hotel and

presented himself at the door of Madame Ghita's apartment.

He was entirely cool, now; quite himself; and was able to present the flowers to the ladies and exchange the usual greetings without a tremor. Only he suspected an uncanny discernment in the long look Madame Ghita gave him as she thanked him for the roses.

She was looking incredibly lovely in a clinging gown of dark, wine-coloured velvet, without ornamentation, and as she moved away from him to place the roses in a vase and order dinner to be served, he drank in again the exquisite grace of her figure, the queenly pose of her head, the regal way in which she moved. And a sudden shaft of fear struck through him. How could he hope to win a woman like that!

She came back in a moment, and motioned them to table.

"Let us sit down," she said. "You here at my left, M. Selden; you at my right, M. Davis; you there, Cicette."

As they took their seats Selden saw that she had placed one of his roses in her bosom, and his hands began to tremble a little, in spite of his efforts to control them. He was grateful that Davis was babbling away excitedly.

"It was great for you to come, old man," he said; "perfectly gorgeous. Imagine a dinner with an empty place!"

Selden chilled at the words. Yes, it was true; he was there in another man's place; this apartment was another man's apartment; this woman . . .

He had an impulse to rise—to run away. It was not at table only he was seeking to take another man's place. The thought was almost more than he could bear.

"I had a premonition the place would be empty unless M. Selden consented to come," said Madame Ghita softly.

Davis stared at her.

"But you were doubtful if he would. . . ."

"I knew that M. Selden had many engagements," said madame, her colour mounting a little. "Nevertheless, I permitted myself to hope."

Selden felt his heart revive. So the place was really his!

"You are very good to me, madame," he murmured, and then he caught Cicette's eyes on him, very round and shining. Well, let the whole world see; he did not care!

But Davis was too engrossed in his own affairs to notice anything.

"I told you, you know," he rattled on, "that this was a very special occasion. Confound it, I can't keep it any longer!" he added, as Cicette made a motion to silence him, and he caught her hand and held it. "Waiter, fill the glasses! Selden, old man, I want you to drink to the health of the sweetest girl in the world—the future Madame Davis!" and he raised Cicette's hand to his lips with more grace than Selden imagined he possessed.

"With all my heart!" cried Selden, deeply moved. "I congratulate you, Davis; and you also, mademoiselle."

"Thank you," said Davis, and held out his hand

across the board. "You said that as though you meant it!"

"I do mean it. She is charming. She will make you a good wife. Take care that you make her a good husband."

At that, the bride-to-be gave him her hand to kiss.

"You also are very charming," she said in rapid French, "and I hope that some day it will be my turn to wish you good fortune." She glanced at Madame Ghita's face, and suddenly sprang to her feet and ran around the table and kissed her. "You are a darling!" she whispered in her ear; "a big, big darling, the dearest of the world!"

Madame held her close for a moment, and then sent her back to her seat.

"You must be sensible," she said.

"Oh, yes, I shall be sensible, do not fear," Miss Fayard assured her. "And I shall try to be, as you say, monsieur, a good wife. But he has need of control, has he not? A strong hand, hein?"

"Truly," agreed Selden; "a very strong hand. Do not hesitate to apply it, mademoiselle, right from the beginning!"

"See here," protested Davis, "don't talk so fast. Or speak English."

"I also learn ze Eengleesh," laughed Miss Fayard. "Oh, already I spik heem verree well. But ees eet not ridicule, ce nom-la—Madame Davees!"

"Well, it is going to be yours," said Davis grimly, "so you'll have to make the best of it. You understand," he went on to Selden, "this is between ourselves as yet. We've got to square things with Mother before it's announced."

"She will never consent, never!" cried Miss Fayard, lapsing into her native tongue.

"Oh, yes, she will," said Davis. "Old Selden has promised to help me. And if she doesn't, it won't make any difference. I'm of age. We won't starve."

Selden looked at him with interest; already he detected in him a new spirit. He was more of a man.

"Yes, I will help," he said; "but whether your mother consents or not, you were right not to wait. There is a very great English poet," he went on to Madame Ghita, "named Robert Browning—perhaps you have heard of him—and he was a great poet because he was first of all a great philosopher. One of his poems is about a man who loved the wife of another man, and she also loved him, and they decided to go away together and be happy. But first one thing intervened, and then another; the days slipped by, and the months and the years—before they knew it, age was upon them, their blood grew cold—it was too late."

"Yes—and then?" asked Madame Ghita, who had been listening with shining eyes.

"Browning points out that their indecision, their cowardice, was far worse, far more damning, than if they had seized their happiness, though that was a crime, and he adds that a man should contend to the uttermost for his life's set prize, be it what it will—vice or virtue—for the worst sin of all is 'the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin.'"

"And he is right," said madame in a low voice.

"Of course he is right—that is why I tell Davis he is wise to seize his happiness while it is within



reach. Whether his mother consents or not—that does not matter.”

“Is it true, then, monsieur,” asked the girl, who had been listening to all this with great eyes, “that in America one can marry without the consent of the parents?”

“But yes,” Selden assured her. “With us it makes no difference whether or not the parents consent. Many times they do not even know about it until after their children are married.”

“It is scarcely to be believed!”

“America, mademoiselle,” said Selden, whose spirit had suddenly lifted its wings within him, “is the land of youth, for youth, about youth. We are young; we permit our young people to tyrannize over us; our literature, our theatre, concerns itself only with their love affairs, which are always innocent and always end in a happy marriage. And in that marriage it is always the woman who dominates. The man is tolerated, because to a marriage a man is necessary; but he has only one function—to provide a pedestal upon which the woman may stand; and but one duty, to worship her all his life. He has promised to do so, and he must keep that promise, no matter how silly and useless he may find her to be. That is the convention, the proper thing, to which all good Americans subscribe.”

“I know! I know!” cried Cicette. “I have seen them—the man following his wife like a footman—a beast of burden.”

“Yes,” said Selden, laughing. “It is only in America the woman walks in front.”

“But there is one thing I cannot understand,”

went on Cicette, "that there are so many American women who leave their husbands at home when they come to Europe."

"Why not?" Selden demanded. "What need has the husband of culture or relaxation? His function is to earn the living."

"But is it not dangerous? Those deserted husbands—do they not find some one . . ."

"Some of them do—but most of them just keep on toiling away. The American husband is incredibly docile and incredibly faithful."

"So I do well to marry an American?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"And he does well to marry a Frenchwoman," said Madame Ghita, "for, in spite of her gay manner, in spite of her apparent thoughtlessness, she is good and very serious at bottom. She will give herself to her husband utterly, without reservation; she will live only for his career; she will be ceaselessly vigilant for his interests; if he is ill, she will nurse him; if he has bad fortune, she will console him; she will herself prepare the dishes he likes to eat, happy to serve him . . ."

"Yes," agreed Selden; "men are more precious over here, more cherished. You have always had more women than men. With us, as with every frontier nation, it has been the other way—and we still preserve the frontier tradition—it is the women who are at a premium!"

"It is deeper than that!" protested madame; "it is in the heart."

"We also have women like that," said Selden quietly; "women who would do anything for the man

they love. You do not see them over here—not often; they are too busy raising their children. They do not figure in the papers, for their life is spent in their homes. Only they demand more of a man than you do. They do not realize what half-tamed creatures we are, and sometimes they demand too much. I think you understand men better.”

“Ah, yes,” laughed Miss Fayard, shaking her finger at Davis. “We understand them! Never believe that I will not understand you! When you lie to me, I shall know it—but you will never suspect that I know—not until long, long afterwards. And then you will be very, very much ashamed!”

“All right,” said Davis, gazing at her in rapt adoration. “I am not afraid! Isn’t she a peach?” he added to Selden.

“Exquisite!” Selden agreed, suddenly sober. “Be good to her, old man!”

“You don’t need to tell me that!” said Davis quickly.

“Perhaps not. What are you going to do after you are married?”

“We’re going to take a trip around the world.”

“Yes—and after that?”

“Oh, settle down somewhere, I guess, and raise a family.”

“That will keep your wife busy, but not you. What are *you* going to do?”

“He will be a great politician!” cried Cicette.

Davis groaned.

“Not in America!”

“He is right,” said Selden, with a smile. “With

us it is not the same thing. Well, you must choose a career for him, mademoiselle, after you know him better; something to keep him busy part of the time, so that he won't be annoying you all day long. I wish I had some one to choose a career for me!" he added.

Madame Ghita looked at him quickly, struck by something in his voice.

"You have your career," she said; "a very wonderful one!"

"Do you think so?"

"But of course! Every one thinks so!" She was looking at him searchingly now, deeply concerned at what she saw in his face. "Do you mean it does not satisfy you?"

"It seems rather empty at times," he confessed.

"Empty? But how is that possible? Oh, you are jesting!"

"I wish . . ."

A sudden commotion at the outer door interrupted him—the sound of a raised voice; and then the curtains were swept aside and Danilo burst into the room.

"I have come for you, Rénee!" he cried, with a wild gesture. "Hasten—I take you away to-night!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### A WOMAN'S DECISION

**T**HERE was a moment's stupefied silence, while the prince looked triumphantly at each of them in turn, his gaze lingering upon Selden an instant longer than upon the others, as though asking what he did there. His eyes were shining strangely, and there was something defiant in his face, something reckless in his air, as of a man who had started forth upon some desperate venture and burned his boats behind him.

"Come!" he said again, as Madame Ghita made no move.

"But I do not understand!" she protested.

"I have had enough of it!" said the prince, and he filled himself a glass of champagne and gulped it down. "I am treated as of no importance, as just a pawn in a game which does not interest me. I am told to do this, not to do that; to marry a woman for whom I care nothing—that would not be so bad; it was what I expected; to that I have agreed. But to leave the woman I love—no, to that I did not agree, and when they tell me I must do it, I say no, it is not possible; it is asking too much! I rebel—yes, I thrust it all aside, and I come to take you away!"

Madame Ghita's face was ghastly.

"But the dynasty—your grandfather; it will kill him," she said, in a voice hoarse with emotion.

"I cannot help it. That is no reason why I should be miserable all my life."

"And your country?"

"Jeneski will rule it better than I. Come! What is it?" he demanded, seeing that she still stared at him as though fascinated, and made no move.

"What is it you fear? That I have no money? See here," and he plunged his hand into his pocket and brought forth a bulky purse. "I have three hundred thousand francs—enough for two years!"

"Where did you get it?" she asked.

"No matter where I got it!" he cried, and a little spasm crossed his face, distorting it for an instant. "I have it—that is enough. Come!"

"No, no!" she protested. "No, no! You cannot do this!"

"Look here," put in Davis, who had caught the drift of things, "what about my sister?"

"Your sister will be far happier if she does not marry me," said the prince. "I am not in the least the man for her."

"Still," protested Davis, "to be deserted like this . . ."

"She may make any explanation she pleases—that it was she who broke off the match—and I will confirm it. I have no wish to injure your sister, monsieur, and she will not be injured."

"Just the same," Davis muttered, "it's pretty tough that it should happen twice!"

"If monsieur wishes any other satisfaction," said the prince haughtily, "I am at his service." Then

he swung back to Madame Ghita. "Alors, Rénee!"

The blood was coming back into her face and she was regaining her self-control.

"Sit down, Danilo," she said, "and do not be so ridiculous. One cannot go away like that. What about my packing?"

"Your maid can do it."

"And you—you are going away like that, with just the clothes you have on?"

"My man will send my things after me."

"No," she said; "you are too silly. You must keep your word to this girl."

"But you told me to-day that, when I marry her, everything is over between us."

"Yes; everything is over between us now, Danilo," she said gently.

His face flushed a fiery red and he strode toward her threateningly.

"Then it is not because of this marriage that you leave me—it is because you no longer love me!"

She made no answer, only looked at him, smiling slightly, a bright spot of colour in either cheek.

"You love some one else!" he shouted. "Who is it?" and his eyes roved for an instant back to Selden's face.

"Ah, Danilo," she said sadly, "do not spoil everything at the end in this way. Do not make me regret that I have known you!"

"Then it is true! Who is it?"

"Monsieur," said Madame Ghita coldly, "I am not to be shouted at, even by you. You are not yourself to-night. If you are going to behave in this manner, I must ask you to withdraw."

For an instant, Selden, tense and ready to spring, thought the prince was going to strike her.

"Withdraw!" he repeated, staring at her and then about the apartment, as though doubting his own senses. "You tell me to withdraw!"

And then he burst into a roar of laughter, pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Come," he said, lighting a cigarette with trembling hand, "it is over. I was a fool, *hein*? What a joke! Give me some wine!"

Davis, much relieved, filled his glass.

"Do you often have these fits?" he asked.

"Not often, *monsieur*," said the prince drily, sipping his wine. "Madame there can testify that I am usually of the most equable. But sometimes—yes, sometimes I think I am a little mad," and he rubbed his hand across his forehead. "Yet we are all of us a little mad, are we not, M. Selden?" and he looked at Selden with a sardonic smile.

"Some more than others," Selden answered.

"Ah, you mean me!" said the prince. "Yes, it is so—I more than others. Sometimes I am quite, quite mad. To-night, *par example*, I thought I had discovered a way of escape from all the things that worried me. That was mad, yes? Because one can never escape!"

"You are right," Selden agreed. "One can never escape—not by running away."

"I see what you mean," and the prince nodded. "To overcome one's troubles, one must not run away; one must face them, yes? Besides, it is cowardly to run away, and a gentleman must not be



a coward. You see I can be a philosopher at times—I am at this moment, very philosophique. I remain—I face my troubles. Monsieur Davis, you will yet have me for a beau-frère! Madame, I ask your pardon!"

"It is granted," she said. "I am happy to see you reasonable again."

"Yes, I am reasonable," he agreed. "Another glass!"

Madame, who had been watching him with evident anxiety, shook her head, but Davis did not see the gesture and filled the glass.

"Wait," said Davis, and re-filled all the glasses. "You remember I told you that I had a surprise for you to-night?"

"Ah, yes," smiled the prince. "What is it?"

"It is that I am going to marry Miss Fayard," answered Davis, unconsciously falling into his idiom. "This is my betrothal dinner."

"Is it true?" cried the prince, and sprang to his feet. "Monsieur—madame—let us drink to the happy pair—to their health, to their happiness, to everything that is good!" He drained his glass, then walked around the table and took the girl's hand. "Mademoiselle," he said, "I have always admired you, for you are good. I pray you to accept this little gift for good luck," and he drew a ring from his finger and slipped it upon hers, then kissed her hand and released it.

"It is beautiful!" she cried, holding it to the light. "But it is your good-luck ring—you should not give me your good-luck ring!"

"I shall not need it any more," he said; "as père de famille, I shall not tempt fortune. I shall just grow fat and lazy." He drew his coat about him.

"You are going?" asked madame.

"Yes—I must be getting back."

"But is it true, Danilo, that you have all that money in your purse?"

"Yes, it is true."

"It is very foolish—and very dangerous."

"Dangerous? In Monte Carlo, where one meets a gendarme at every ten steps? Besides—do not worry—I shall place it in the bank as soon as possible. Unless—have you need of some?" and he thrust his hand in his pocket.

"Ah, no!" she said quickly, with a gesture of repugnance.

"It is yours if you want it," he persisted, his hand still in his pocket, a strange smile on his lips.

"I do not want it," she answered quietly.

"Then good night," said the prince. "You have been very good to me, madame; I shall never forget it, and shall wish you happiness always. And you, monsieur," he continued to Selden, "I regret that it has not been my privilege to know you better—I feel that we might have been friends. But I wish you all good fortune." He hesitated, his eyes on Selden's, as though debating whether to say something more; then, with a little shake of the head, turned to Miss Fayard. "And to you, mademoiselle, again I say good-luck. I am sure you will bring good luck to others. How old are you?" he added, as though struck by a sudden thought.

"I am nineteen, M. le Prince."

"Nineteen—a good age—a lucky age!" he said, and kissed her hand. "And you, M. Davis—but I do not need to wish you good fortune—you have it there," and he nodded toward the girl. "Do not worry, my friend—I will do my best to make your sister happy. I can promise, at least, not to annoy her. Good-bye!"

And with a wave of his hat, he was gone.

They all sat for a moment without speaking, staring at the door through which he had vanished. Then Davis reached for his glass.

"Yes, he is mad," he gulped. "But what does he mean, going away like that? He—he frightens me!"

Again there was a moment's silence. Perhaps he frightened all of them. Madame Ghita touched her eyes gently with her handkerchief.

"He reminds me of a man about to go over the top," said Selden, pensively; "in a sort of ecstasy. I have seen them like that many times, as they stood waiting for the word."

"Yes," cried Miss Fayard, with a catch in her throat, "the word to go forward to their death!"

"It is not always death," said Selden gently, his heart very tender for the lovely sad woman beside him. "Sometimes it is victory!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE PRINCE PLAYS

THEY still tell, at the Sporting Club, of the last visit of Prince Danilo. There have been other visits more spectacular, ending with a pistol-shot on the terrace or a draught of poison in the wash-room; but of them no one speaks. There have been many persons who won more or lost more—and were promptly forgotten. But there was something about the prince that night, an air of mystery and unreality, which the onlookers never forgot; and his style was so exquisite, his bearing so perfect, that they have ever since served as a model by which the attendants measure each new aspirant for the honours of the rooms. And all are agreed that they have never been approached.

That visit, indeed, has not only been remembered, but is rapidly passing into legend. Already it has been richly embroidered, and reasons the most fanciful have been advanced as to why the prince chose to play a certain number, or why he chose to play at all, and dazzling stories have been woven of what would have happened if he had played at any other table in the room, instead of the one he actually selected. All of which is, of course, inevitable, because the great diversion of the habitués of Monte Carlo, aside from trying to devise a system to beat

the bank, is explaining what would have happened "if!" How many times daily the bank would be broken but for that little word!

As a matter of fact, when the prince left the Hotel de Paris, he probably did not expect to play at all, for he asked the giant be-medalled negro who keeps the door to call his car. The negro explained respectfully that it was his infinite regret to be obliged to inform M. le Prince that a slight accident had happened to the car; a careless chauffeur, in turning, had backed into it and damaged the front axle slightly. Already it was being straightened in the hotel garage, and would be ready in twenty minutes. If M. Le Prince wished another car?

"No," said the prince. "I will wait," and he walked slowly down to the terrace and stood for a moment looking out to sea. A gardien saw and recognized him, and saluted respectfully as he passed.

He might have stood there until the car was ready but for a violent gust of rain which swept suddenly in from the sea and drove him back up the steps. At the top he hesitated. The lights of the Sporting Club gleamed on his left, and at last he turned slowly toward them. Perhaps it was in his mind that, since the Goddess of Fortune had dealt him one staggering blow that night, she might now, like a true woman, relent and smile upon him.

At any rate, he mounted the steps to the entrance and passed in.

The rooms were crowded, as always, and all the tables were in play, but he passed through without pausing or looking at any one, and walked on into the buffet, where he ordered a whiskey and soda and

drank it standing at the bar. Then, as though his resolution was taken, he walked quickly back into the gaming rooms, stopped at the nearest table, changed a thousand-franc note for ten plaques, and placed them around the number nineteen.

The chef de partie, sitting in his high chair behind the croupiers and surveying the whole board, must have sensed something unusual in the prince's manner, for he watched him intently, but no one else paid any attention to him. Every one was absorbed in the play.

An attendant asked him if he wished a chair, but he shook his head and remained standing.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs; faites vos jeux!" called the croupier, and bets were placed up and down the board, but the prince alone was on nineteen. "Les jeux sont faits?" and the croupier leaned forward, picked the little ivory ball out of the compartment into which it had fallen the previous play, gently reversed the motion of the wheel, and with a quick snap of his middle finger sent the ball circling around and around the cupped rim of the wheel—around and around, six times, seven times, eight times, and then its pace began to slacken.

"Rien ne va plus!" called the croupier sharply, and the ball fell with a rattle into the middle of the wheel, coasted up its raised centre, hesitated for the merest instant, and settled with a quick snap into one of the compartments.

"Le dix-neuf!" announced the croupier. "Rouge, impair et passe."

Breaths that had been held were released, and there was a murmur of voices lamenting that they

had not been on nineteen. For the prince had won.

It was not very much—perhaps fifteen thousand francs—but he seemed to regard it as a sign, for he too took a quick breath and nodded to an attendant, who hastened to find a chair for him. The prince sat down, placed his winnings in front of him, and began to play with absorbed attention, always on or around or in connection with the number nineteen.

There have been many stories of desperate persons who risked an entire fortune on a single turn of the wheel and lost, or of lucky individuals who won enormous sums by permitting their stakes to accumulate as the same number came out again and again. Neither of these things is possible, for the bank sets arbitrary limits to the play, running from a hundred and eighty francs on a number, which pays thirty-five for one, to six thousand francs on the simple chances, odd or even, red or black, high or low, which wins an equal amount. So that, if one plays the maximum on all the chances, it is possible—though rather difficult—to lose about thirty thousand francs, or to win a little over a hundred thousand. But that is the limit.

So the prince, playing cautiously and confining himself at first to the *cheveaux* and *carrés*, took a long time in losing the fifteen thousand francs he had won, even though nineteen did not come again. Twenty, seventeen and twenty-three came, which helped to recoup his losses, and it was at least an hour after he had sat down that the last of his fifteen thousand francs were swept away.

He glanced at his watch and made a motion as if to rise, then decided to wait for the next play.

The ball fell into nineteen.

There was an outcry of sympathy and indignation on the part of the spectators. What a shame, what a crime, that his number should come at the very moment he had ceased playing!

Quietly, as though moved by some power stronger than himself, the prince drew his purse from his pocket, opened it and laid it on the table before him. And this time he staked the maximum.

It is not often that any one stakes the maximum at Monte Carlo. Even in this day thirty thousand francs is a considerable sum. So an electric whisper ran around the room that something unusual was going forward at the prince's table, and the crowd around it became thicker and thicker. The chef de partie, scenting a battle royal, sent hastily to the cashier for an extra supply of funds.

The hand of the croupier was perhaps a shade less steady than usual as he picked up the marble and started it on its run. It spun, faltered, rattled, clicked . . .

"The twenty-seven," announced the croupier. "Red, odd and low."

The prince had won six thousand and lost twenty-four. Imperturbably he placed his bets again. It was at this moment that Selden entered the room.

The prince's abrupt departure had left a constraint upon the dinner-party, which was not to be shaken off. They had gone from the dining-room into the salon, and there, after one or two ineffectual attempts at gaiety, Davis and his fiancée had withdrawn to a corner sofa to discuss certain strictly



intimate affairs, and Selden had smoked a cigarette with Madame Ghita and talked of desultory and unimportant things—of anything, indeed, except the one thing which had been in his mind to say when he was buying the roses.

Impossible to say that now—impossible even to hint at it. It would be indecent—like wooing a woman whose husband was dying in the next room! Besides, she was in no mood for such confidences; she was distraught and sad. The conversation faltered and died away; and presently he summoned up courage to take his departure. She had been obviously grateful that he should go.

He was too depressed and agitated to think of sleep, so he slipped into his coat, left the hotel and descended to the terrace, just as the prince had done half an hour before.

The rain-squall earlier in the evening had swept the terrace bare, and he found himself alone there, except for the gardien. Masses of slaty clouds were fleeing across the sky before the gusty wind, with the moon peeping between them now and then and sending fugitive gleams of light over the white-capped waves, which hissed and moaned dolefully as they were driven in upon the rocky shore. More doleful still was the rustle of the palms and the clatter of the rubber trees flapping in the wind like a flock of ghostly night-birds. And above him gleamed the lights of the casino, standing like a courtesan, white and gilt and laboriously gay, but at heart most dismal of all!

Selden gave himself up for a time to the luxury of self-pity—to that most dangerous of all dissipa-

tions, a fit of the blues. What was the use of going on? What was the use of having ideals or of fighting for them? The world paid no heed. What, indeed, was the world but a huge casino, where every one was struggling to win his neighbour's gold?

Why, above all, should he worry himself about a woman who was sad because another man was leaving her?

But here his sense of justice asserted itself. The man was not leaving her—she was sending him away. He had come seeking her and she had refused to go. She had made her choice; but how could she help being sad at the thought that one epoch of her life was ended? She had lived with this man in closest intimacy; he had no doubt been kind and generous. He had loved her. At the end he had come offering everything he had—and she had sent him away. Where had he gone?

A sudden thought startled Selden out of his moodiness. What had the prince meant when he promised to give his money to the bank? Why had he smiled so ironically? Which bank?

In a moment Selden was hurrying toward the Sporting Club, and the instant he entered the rooms he knew that his suspicion was correct. That dense crowd around a single table could mean only one thing—somebody was playing the limit.

"He is playing nineteen—always nineteen," said a man beside him to his neighbour.

Nineteen! Then of course it was the prince.

It was some time before Selden could get near enough to see what was going on, but meanwhile the marble had been spun twice and he heard the

croupier announce two and eleven. Then he managed to worm himself into a position from which he could see the prince.

Danilo seemed entirely cool, nonchalant—listless, even. He was smoking a cigarette and tossing his notes into place upon the board as though they were so many bits of worthless paper. He appeared equally indifferent as to whether he won or lost, and totally unconscious of the gaping crowd that watched him. Selden recognized in his bearing the cold fury of the confirmed gambler, which stops at nothing. There had been in his head the idea that he might intervene, but he saw that it was useless. To speak to the prince now would be to insult him.

"The thirty-five!" announced the croupier. "Black, odd and low."

Well, that was not so bad—six thousand on low and six on odd. But the next number was six and the board was swept clear again.

The prince proceeded calmly to renew his bets.

Nineteen must come sometime, Selden told himself. If it came once, the prince would win back all he had lost. If it came twice, he would be a hundred thousand francs ahead.

Sixteen! That was good—thirty thousand francs, nearly—a gain. But the next numbers were fifteen, thirty-three, three and again six, and the prince had lost another hundred thousand.

Nobody else was playing; it was a battle between the prince and the bank. M. le Directeur des Jeux had come out from his little office to watch it, and to take command if necessary. The prince lighted another cigarette and placed his money again.

Nineteen!

There was a little cheer from the crowd as the croupier counted out the various bets one after the other, and pushed the notes across to the prince.

Again now! And every one pulled for nineteen as the little ball spun gaily around. But it fell into eight, and again the board was swept clean.

That was the beginning of a bad run; six—there was a fatality about that six!—eight again—thirty-three—twelve—two—twenty-four—a little gain there!—fifteen. And then there was a short rally: sixteen—twenty—twenty-three; but never again nineteen. Then another bad run, and the pile of notes under the prince's hand diminished rapidly. He did not hesitate—always nineteen.

The crowd was beginning to get impatient with him. Why nineteen? Why keep it up when he saw it was not a good number? And as if to mock him, the croupier at the next table could be heard announcing nineteen! But certainly he should change—if not the number, then the table. It was imbecile to keep on like that!

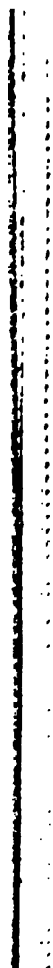
But the prince did not change.

It was nearly two o'clock when he finally put his empty purse away and rose to his feet.

"Messieurs," he said, with a little bow to the directeur and the chef de partie, "I have to thank you for a very pleasant evening."

And he walked calmly to the door, got his hat and coat from the vestiaire, and went out into the night.

## **PART V.—FRIDAY**



## CHAPTER XXIV

### AN AFFAIR OF STATE

**S**ELDEN took train for Nice next morning with a sense of impending calamity. He was greatly depressed. The emotional events of the previous evening had overtaxed his nerves. He had slept badly, disturbed by elusively threatening dreams, and his brain was muggy and distraught. He was almost sorry he had not heeded his impulse to run away—to leave his lamp unlit! He doubted more and more whether its feeble rays would ever guide him out of the labyrinth in which he was madly wandering, and from which there seemed to be no way of escape.

The train he had caught was a local, and as it bumped its leisurely way along, he had time to review his position over a contemplative pipe; but the more he considered it, the worse it seemed to grow; turn it as he might, he could discover no bright side. Of one thing only he was certain: his life would never again be the calm and satisfactory thing it had been. A few days had changed it beyond recognition: it was no longer simple: it was incredibly complex. He could scarcely believe that only eighty hours had elapsed since he had walked into the lounge of the Hotel de Paris to meet the Countess Rémond.

At Nice, the passengers were hurried across the tracks, for the Rome-Paris express had been sig-

nalled, and as he gave up his ticket to the guard at the exit, Selden's eye caught a familiar figure. It was Halsey, walking nervously up and down in the waiting-room, pausing now and then to watch the people pouring from the train-shed. His eyes met Selden's for an instant, but he gave no sign of recognition. He was rather a pitiable figure, his face grey and drawn, his eyes shot with blood—evidently his affair with the countess was not progressing smoothly. Well, he was only getting what he deserved, Selden told himself, as he turned away.

It still lacked fifteen minutes of the hour named by the baron; so, deciding that the walk would do him good, Selden turned briskly down the Avenue des Victoires toward the sea. The street was swarming, as usual, with tourists and winter residents, whose presence there was always an insoluble mystery to Selden. He never could understand why any one would want to spend a winter at Nice, when there were so many other places up and down the coast infinitely more attractive. It was the herd instinct, he decided, which brought these thousands of people here to spend their vacations in an inordinately expensive hotel or a dingy pension, with nothing to do except walk up and down the Promenade des Anglais, or look sadly on at the laboriously manufactured gaieties.

He found the Promenade a solid mass of people moving in two slow currents, one up, one down, for this was the fashionable hour to get out and take the sun and exhibit one's new gown, which some man somewhere had somehow procured the money for. Truly, human nature is a curious thing!



The gates of the Villa Gloria were open, and he walked through, past the concierge, who recognized him and touched his cap, up the path to the door, where a waiting attendant received him and ushered him at once into the salon.

The king and Lappo were already there and greeted him warmly. Then the baron introduced him to the notary, M. Noblemaire—a true type, with hawk-nose, crinkly beard, and carefully brushed clothes of rusty black—who, with an assistant, was going over the papers to make sure that everything was in order.

The prince came in a moment later, greeted Selden casually, and sat down beside the long table which occupied the centre of the room. He was dressed in irreproachable morning costume and, save for a slight pallor, gave no hint in his appearance of his exciting experiences of the night before. No one looking at him would have suspected that he had lost a fortune! Selden was conscious of a great relief, for he had expected he knew not what—some excitement, some discomposure, at least some vestige of wreckage after the storm. Certainly the prince had consummate self-control!

Then the door opened and Mrs. Davis and her daughter were shown in—the former very warm and voluble, the latter as composed as the prince himself.

Nothing could have been more delicate, more exquisitely attuned to the situation, than the way in which Danilo greeted her, respectful, reserved, but with just a hint of ardency beneath the surface. From the quick glance she shot at the prince's face,

Selden inferred the manner was new to her, but it was evidently not distasteful, and as he turned away to meet Mrs. Davis, who was bearing down upon him, he saw that the baron was contemplating it with satisfaction. The prince had been tamed. He was playing the game, and playing it extraordinarily well!

"How do you do, Mr. Selden?" cried Mrs. Davis. "It was *too* good of you to consent to be our witness. I should not have dared to ask, but the dear baron assured me that you were very good-natured. . . ."

Miss Davis came forward and gave him her hand.

"It was nice of you," she said; "and it relieves my mind."

"Relieves your mind?"

She smiled a little at his tone.

"I regard it as the seal of your approval," she explained.

"Do you still need the seal of my approval?" he asked.

"It is very comforting to have it. That is what your being here means, isn't it?"

"I suppose so; but you must remember that I am looking at it from the outside, while you . . ."

"I know what you mean," she said, as he hesitated. "There is no reason why you should beat around the bush—I am not a child!"

"Of course—but it has bothered me."

"It needn't bother you any longer. It is all right. I had a letter from her this morning—a very splendid letter. Some day I should like to know her."

Mrs. Davis, to whom M. Noblemaire had been

presented, was announcing that Charley had stopped for their notary, since it *was* necessary they have their own notary.

"But surely, madame," said M. Noblemaire, who had some English. "Otherwise it would be most irregular."

Well, so Charley had gone around for him, and should arrive at any moment. And, sure enough, at that moment Charley did arrive with another notary in tow.

The two men of the robe greeted each other with punctilious politeness. To look at them, no one would have suspected that they played dominoes together every evening at the café on the corner.

"We are all here, I think," said the king, and took his place at the head of the table. Baron Lappo conducted Miss Davis and her mother to the seats at the king's right. The prince took his place at his grandfather's left, and their partisans ranged themselves on either side below them. Selden found himself near the foot of the table, facing M. Noblemaire's assistant.

For some minutes, there was a great rustling of papers on the part of the notaries. Then they bent their heads together across the table in earnest conversation, while M. Noblemaire explained two or three of the clauses to his colleague, who seemed to be objecting to something, as a matter of form, no doubt, to give the appearance of earning his fee, but who finally nodded his head as though satisfied, and settled back in his chair.

Then M. Noblemaire cleared his throat and rose to his feet.

"Mesdames et messieurs," he began, speaking in French, with a pronounced accent of the Midi, and dwelling upon every syllable after the manner of an orator, "we have come here to-day to sign and to acknowledge certain articles of agreement between the royal house of Ghita and the American family Davis, which envisage the marriage of a prince of that house with a daughter of that family. With your permission, I will proceed to read those articles."

He adjusted his glasses and began to read, with great care and solemnity, while his fellow-notary followed on a duplicate copy, checking off the articles one by one. Selden listened with deep interest. He was gratified to hear the baron's assertion verified: Miss Davis's fortune was to remain absolutely in her hands, and was to descend to her children. The necessity of children was recognized quite frankly, and their status, rights, and privileges were provided for in great detail. During the lifetime of the king, he was to be their guardian jointly with their mother. After his death, this duty was to devolve upon the Baron Lappo. The prince was to have a yearly allowance of two hundred thousand francs and his present debts were to be paid. In return, he engaged to reside within the borders of his country for ten months of every year, unless his presence elsewhere was necessitated by reasons of state approved by the king.

Selden glanced up and down the board, as Noblemaire read slowly on. The king and Lappo were listening attentively, careful to let no word escape them; the prince sat with arms folded and eyes

downcast and face inexpressive, like a prisoner listening while sentence was pronounced; Miss Davis sat quietly attentive, her hands folded in her lap. Her attitude seemed to say that, since this document concerned her so closely, it behooved her to be familiar with all its provisions, but it was a matter of business, not of sentiment. Selden recalled the baron's words about her. Was it really some old trial, some cruel disillusion, which had given her this serene self-control? Had she really suffered some disastrous adventure? It scarcely seemed possible.

And then Selden remembered a sentence which her brother had uttered, apparently at random, the night before. It had passed unheeded then, but Selden found that it had somehow stuck in his memory. What was it he had said? "It's pretty tough that it should happen twice!" Something like that.

That what should happen twice? That she should be twice deserted? For another woman? Was it that old affair with Jeneski he referred to? Had Jeneski deserted her for another woman—the Countess Rémond? But the Countess Rémond hated him too! She also was seeking to be revenged.

And suddenly the pieces of the puzzle fell together in his mind like the bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope, and he understood.

Jeneski was to be overthrown because two women hated him; the destiny of a people was to be changed, the course of history altered, to gratify their vengeance.

Ah, well, that had happened a thousand times;

women were always altering the course of history to suit their whims or their passions; damming it up, throwing it into strange channels . . .

Or perhaps it was only his too-fervid imagination magnifying a chance remark. Myra Davis certainly did not look like a girl to seek adventure, to court disaster. At any rate, whether or not she had been deserted once, she was not being deserted twice. Presently she would be a princess, and after that queen-regent. Her son would be a king—the first king in history to be born of an American woman. That, also, would alter its course!

M. Noblemaire's voice droned on, and each of them sat and listened and dreamed his dream; and Mrs. Davis's, perhaps, was the sweetest of all—of a place on the steps of a throne . . .

Then suddenly the voice ceased and startled them awake.

"You find it correct, I trust, monsieur?" inquired M. Noblemaire of his fellow notary.

"Yes, monsieur; in every detail."

"Then we have only to sign," said M. Noblemaire, and turned to his assistant for the pens, ink and blotter.

Selden was amused to see that the pens were long quills.

M. Noblemaire dipped one of them in the ink, picked up the paper, and approached the king.

"If you will sign here, Your Majesty," he said, and laid the paper before him, indicated the place, and handed him the pen.

The king scrawled a great PIETRO across the page.

It was the prince's turn next, and the baron witnessed the signatures.

"Now, mademoiselle," said M. Noblemaire, and laid the document in front of Miss Davis.

She took the pen from him with a hand that shook a little.

"No, no!" cried a voice outside. "It is impossible, monsieur; you cannot enter! Monsieur . . ."

"But I must enter!" cried another voice, and the door was thrown open with a crash.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE COURSE OF HISTORY

**F**OR a moment no one stirred—just sat and stared at the man who came, swift and resolute, into the room, while the frightened attendant goggled from the door behind him—a man of perhaps forty, with dark, vivid face, outlined by a little beard, and a mop of black hair falling over his forehead, and deep-set eyes gleaming under heavy brows—a man with a bearing indescribably confident and audacious; just sat and stared as he advanced quickly to the table, bowed to Selden and to the Baron Lappo, and then went straight to Myra Davis, took her hand—dashing to the floor the pen he found in it—and drew her to her feet, against his breast.

“Little one,” he said, “I have come for you.”

But she held him away from her—held him away with arms trembling and convulsive, but inflexible; and there was something like terror in her eyes as she looked at him.

“No, no,” she gasped. “You are horrible to come here like this.”

“I love you!”

“It is too late!”

“It is not too late! Why is it too late?”



"Because—I do not—love you any more!"

"No?" he asked calmly, without any motion to release her. "Of course—in that case . . ."

But by this time the king was on his feet, his face purple.

"What is this farce?" he roared. "Jacopo—Mario—throw this fellow out!"

"One moment, sir," said the stranger. "Perhaps the Baron Lappo will do me the honour to present me."

And the Baron Lappo, his face a study, rose in his turn.

"Your Majesty," he said, "this is M. Jeneski."

Jeneski, of course, had recognized him, and Mrs. Davis, too, apparently, from the energy with which she now rushed forward, rescued her daughter from his grasp, and tried to kill him with a look. But to the king it was undoubtedly a blow, and for an instant his hand fumbled at his breast. Yet not for nothing had the old warrior reigned for sixty years in the midst of hate and violence, and his composure was back in a moment. He signed to Jacopo to close the door.

"M. Jeneski," he said, with a bow, "I have often wished to meet you."

"I must apologize for my abrupt entrance, sir," said Jeneski, smiling his appreciation of the king's aplomb, "but I feared that I should be too late."

"Too late for what, sir?" asked the king.

"Too late for this ceremony," explained Jeneski, with a gesture toward the papers on the table.

"Ah," said the king, "you wish to witness it?"

"I wish to prevent it," corrected Jeneski quietly.

The king wrinkled his brow incredulously, and his colour heightened a little.

"Really," he began.

"Believe me, sir," said Jeneski quickly, "I deeply regret this violent and dramatic procedure. I assure you that it is not at all in my character, but I had no choice. I have strained every nerve to reach here at the earliest possible moment. I should have arrived last night, but was delayed by a series of misadventures which I will not weary you by reciting. So when, twenty minutes ago, at the villa of Madame Davis, I learned of this conference, I could only hasten here and force my way in."

"You may as well force your way out again," broke in Mrs. Davis, who had listened to all this with a face even redder than the king's. "If you think for a minute my daughter will have anything to do with you . . ."

"Hush, mother," whispered the girl, her face convulsed.

"I confess," said the king politely, "that I do not understand. Is it that you profess to have some claim upon this young lady?"

"Only the claim of a man who loves her," said Jeneski humbly.

"Love!" began Mrs. Davis, violently.

But again her daughter stopped her.

"I am at a very great disadvantage," went on Jeneski. "It is very difficult to speak—to explain—to say what I have to say thus publicly. If I for one moment might see Miss Davis alone . . ."

"Never!" cried her mother.

His eyes implored the girl, but she turned her face away.

"Very well," he said, and drew close to her side. "I must speak to you then, little one, as though we were alone. Forget that there is any one present but you and me." His voice was trembling with emotion. He paused an instant to collect himself and moistened his lips nervously. "Before I say anything else, I must say this: for the wrong I did you in a moment of madness I have suffered much. Perhaps if you knew the whole story—but no; there is no excuse. I say to you only that I have suffered, that I have done great penance. All that was torn out of my life and cast aside many months ago. Since then I have thought only of my country and of you. The baron can tell you that this is true—since he has used that old affair to secure an accomplice in the plot against me."

She was staring at him with wide-open eyes, white to the lips, her hands pressed against her heart. He made no motion to touch her, but his eyes never wavered from hers.

"Even then," he went on rapidly, "I would not have dreamed of coming near you—no, not yet. I would have worked on for my country and cleansed myself with sacrifice—loving you always and hoping that some day you might find me worthy; but this, this alliance—it must not be! Do you know what you are doing? You are riveting again on half a million people the shackles they have just thrown off after a struggle of two centuries . . ."

"We are willing to leave it to the people themselves, sir," put in the baron quietly.

"Ah, yes," cried Jeneski, "after you have corrupted them with I know not what promises! Of course they will choose the easy way!"

"Well, then," said the baron.

"They are not fit to choose—not yet. Let them learn first what freedom means. Come—I ask nothing for myself—nothing," he went on, turning back to the girl. "I have no right to ask anything for myself. Do I not know it? Yes—better than any one. But for my country I do ask—I have the right to ask; not much—only this: that you delay this marriage for a year—for six months, even—*then* leave it to the people. . . ."

He had raised his arms in his excitement, and as he brought them down with an impassioned gesture, there was a spatter of blood across the papers on the table, and a steady drip, drip from under his sleeve and across his left hand to the floor.

He seized his left arm near the shoulder and held it tight.

"What is that?" asked Myra Davis, taking a quick step toward him. "Are you hurt?"

"It is nothing," said Jeneski impatiently; "less than nothing; just one of the misadventures which delayed me." Then a little smile flitted across his lips, and he looked at the baron. "I confess, however, that I did not suppose the Baron Lappo would descend to methods so—so primitive."

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the baron.

"Was it not you," asked Jeneski, still smiling, "who posted that big Englishman on the platform up yonder to shoot me as I left the train?"

The baron's face was livid.

"M. Jeneski," he began, "I swear to you . . ."

"It was not the baron," put in Selden quickly. "It was the Countess Rémond. I knew she was driving Halsey on to something—but I never guessed . . ."

"Ah, well, I should have guessed," said Jeneski. "I apologize to you, M. le Baron. After all, it is nothing—a scratch across the arm. I had time to bandage it but hastily, so it bleeds a little. I am sorry."

There was a moment's pause. Then Myra Davis released herself from her mother's grasp and turned to Baron Lappo.

"Is it true," she asked, "what he said about that—that affair?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," answered the baron grimly. "It is true."

The colour had come back into her face and her eyes were shining.

"And is it true that you have suffered?" she asked of Jeneski.

He made a little motion with his hands, more expressive than any words.

"I have suffered, too," she said simply.

"Oh, my love," said Jeneski, humbly, "some day I hope you will find it in your heart to pardon me!"

She stood yet an instant looking at him, then she held out her hands.

"I pardon you now!" she said.

It was over. The Davises were gone, and Selden too had tried to go, but the baron had asked him to remain.

The king had behaved magnificently. Well he knew the folly of trying to argue with a woman's heart, and he had uttered no word of disappointment or reproach. Instead, having thrown and lost, he took defeat like a sportsman and a gentleman, faced ruin, exile, tragic failure, with a smile; had even wished her happiness and kissed her hand in farewell. With Jeneski he had been almost cordial.

Selden had never admired him so much, though he told himself it was this very habit of dissimulation which rendered the king least admirable. Perhaps he had not yet lost hope—some fanatic with a better aim than poor, fuddled Halsey might take a shot at Jeneski—or there was the countess herself, presumably raging somewhere at the failure of her plot. There was still that possible alliance between young Davis and the Princess Anna. Finally there was always that huge sum which had been offered for his abdication; which he had once refused, but which he could still accept whenever it seemed wise, and upon which he could live comfortably for the remainder of his life. No doubt it was such considerations as these which enabled the king to bear up so well.

Selden was surprised to note that Danilo seemed far more deeply affected. He was like a man stunned; slouched forward in his chair, staring at the papers with the dash of blood across them, his face ghastly in its pallor.

"We must consider," said the baron, "how best to announce this to the world. M. Selden, I am sure, will not wish to do us any unnecessary injury."

"Certainly not," said Selden. "I shall use only the official version."

"I will not conceal from you," went on the baron, "that this—*débâcle* I think I can call it—has left us in a somewhat delicate position. We had made certain financial arrangements, based on this alliance, which will have to be cancelled, or at least reconsidered. Fortunately . . ."

He hesitated, glancing at the king.

"Yes," the king nodded, "I have not touched the money since I placed it in my bureau last night. It can be returned if Hirsch demands it."

"It is that fact alone," the baron pointed out, "which saves us from the most painful embarrassment."

The prince stirred uneasily, passed his hand across his haggard forehead, and rose unsteadily to his feet.

"You will excuse me," he said.

The king nodded and the prince went slowly out.

"I did not suppose it would be such a blow to him," said the king, as the door closed behind Danilo. "I do not understand it. Unless he has been losing again—but he has no money."

"No," agreed the baron; "and I know of no way he could secure any."

Selden managed to keep an impassive face, but he was smiling inwardly. Evidently the prince had sources of supply unknown to the baron.

"Whatever it is," said the king, "let us hope it will make him more serious. Continue, baron."

The baron paced up and down for a moment, his chin in his hand.

"Of course she will marry Jeneski," he said, at last, and glanced at his master.

"Yes, I understand, Lappo," said the king quietly. "You would say that it is finished—that the game is up. Well, we shall see—I have confidence in my star! At least . . . what was that?"

From somewhere in the house had come a muffled report as of a door slamming—or a pistol shot . . .

A sudden pallor swept over the king's face.

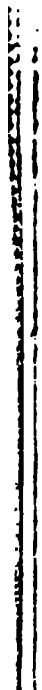
"Danilo!" he cried, and started to rise, then sank back clutching at his breast. "Danilo!"

But Danilo lay sprawled across his bed, a bullet through his heart.

He had managed to escape, after all!



## EPILOGUE



## CHAPTER XXVI

### A LAST ENCOUNTER

"SINCE this is our last night in Paris," said Selden, looking up from his paper, "we ought to celebrate it. What shall we do?"

"The opera," replied Rénee instantly. "Let me see what it is," and she took the paper away from him.

It was Samson and Delila.

"And the curtain is at eight," she added. "We must hurry!"

They were there when the curtain rose, and were soon under the spell of the enchanting music with which Saint-Saëns has clothed the old Scripture allegory of man's weakness and woman's perfidy—a drama which is re-enacted daily wherever men and women live, and so touches a chord in every heart. Surely no lovelier song was ever written than Delila's

Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix comme s'ouvrent les fleurs  
Aux baisers de l'aurore . . .

"My heart opens at thy voice as the flowers open to the kisses of the dawn . . ."

And no more effective scene was ever staged than that of the blinded Samson, chained like a beast to

the mill, and pushing it round and round. So the great drama swept on to the supreme moment when Samson, praying for strength, bends his back between the mighty pillars of the temple and brings it crashing down upon the heads of his enemies.

There was to be a ballet afterwards to a Chopin suite, and when Selden and his companion came back from a turn in the foyer, they found that the front row of the orchestra, which had been empty during the opera, was filling up with distinguished-looking old men, most of them with the rosette of the Legion gleaming red on their coats.

Rénée nodded toward them with a smile.

"You see," she said; "it is as I told you. They come for the ballet only. But look—who is that? Is it not the Baron Lappo?"

"So it is," said Selden, and they watched him take his seat, a little thinner, perhaps, with the passage of the months, a little greyer, but still erect, alert. "I wonder what he is doing in Paris? Shall we waylay him after the ballet?"

"Yes, let us. There are so many things I should like to ask him!"

"I also," said Selden, and then fell silent, for the music had begun.

There is nothing lovelier to be seen anywhere than that Chopin suite as danced at the Paris Opéra. . . .

"Do you regret that it is not you?" asked Selden, as the tall and willowy Ida Rubenstein came forward again and again to acknowledge the applause.

"Not the slightest—not the smallest bit," and she nestled against his shoulder. "I know too well what

is behind the scenes. Besides, I could never have been like that—I was not a great dancer.”

Selden put his hand over hers and held it tight. He could never get over his astonishment at the thought that this magnificent woman loved him, was his. . . .

“We must hurry,” she added, “if we are going to catch the baron.”

“Wait a moment here,” said Selden, “and I will go around and get him. I should like to surprise him—I don’t think he knows.”

She nodded, and he hurried away to the door by which the baron would emerge into the foyer. Yes, there he was—not changed; and yet changed, too, in some subtle way—clouded, a little sad, with the lines about the eyes a trifle more pronounced.

Selden’s heart moved curiously, as he watched him coming forward; he had never before realized how fond he had grown of the old diplomat.

“My dear baron,” he said, and stepped forward with hand outstretched.

The baron adjusted his glass and looked to see who it was.

“Why, it is M. Selden!” he cried. “My dear friend!” and he caught Selden’s hands in both of his and shook them up and down, his face irradiated. “How glad I am to see you again! Come—we must have a talk—yes?”

“By all means! But first I want you to meet some one,” and he caught the baron’s arm and guided him to the spot where Rénee waited. “Baron,” he said, “permit me to introduce you to my wife.”

"Your wife!" The baron's lips were trembling as he pressed them to Rénee's hand. "Tiens!" and he dropped his glass and polished it vigorously. "But, my dear children—how happy you make me! I should like to embrace you! I am a silly old man—yes?" and he touched his handkerchief to his eyes without shame. "But you recall so many things! Where shall we go? We cannot talk here. To Rizzi's—it is but a step!" and seizing an arm of each, he led them down the great stairway and across the square, talking in broken sentences all the way.

Monsieur Rizzi knew the Baron Lappo, and he snatched the reservation card from a glass on the corner table and seated the baron and his guests there, and himself took the order.

"Let me see," said the baron, "you used to have a Moët et Chandon, very dry . . ."

"Ah, yes, the '98," said M. Rizzi. "We still have a few bottles, M. le Baron."

"It is foolish at my age, at this hour," said the baron; "but never mind; and a little lobster, yes? with mayonnaise. I have not forgotten your mayonnaise. And afterwards—what?"

"Permit me," said M. Rizzi; "a surprise."

"Very well," agreed the baron; "I am sure it will be a delightful one." And then as Rizzi hastened away to make sure that the order was properly executed, the baron turned back to his guests. "Now let me look at you," he said. "Madame, I have never seen you so lovely, so radiant. And you also," he added to Selden; "you also appear content!"

"Content is a feeble word!" said Selden.

"So—it is well! But would you believe, madame, that I one day found this great imbecile in his room at Monte Carlo, trembling with fear, packing his bag, even; planning to run away—to run away from a great happiness. Incredible, is it not? But men do stupid things like that sometimes, and women, too, though not so often. So, because I had grown fond of him, I ventured to give him some advice . . ."

"Which I followed," said Selden.

"You have not been sorry?"

"Sorry!"

"Just the same," went on the baron, "you are not worthy of her."

"Good Lord, don't I know it?" groaned Selden. "Don't I wake up every morning in a panic for fear it is only a dream!"

"Fi donc!" laughed Rénee. "How silly you both are!"

The waiter had filled the glasses, and the baron lifted his from the table.

"Words are so weak to express what is in the heart," he said, "but I am sure you know what is in mine—every wish for your happiness and your good fortune—and may you always love each other!"

They drank, and set the glasses back upon the table, and there was a little silence.

Then M. Rizzi brought the lobster for the baron's approval, and himself proceeded to dismember it.

"There is something else that I recall very vividly," went on the baron; "that day, when I found you so depressed, there was another thing

that worried you—how did you say it?—that your future was behind you! Is it still there, or is it in front, where it should be?"

"It is in front again," said Selden with a smile, "due also to this wonderful woman."

"I will not have it!" cried Rénee. "It was M. Scott's idea."

"But it was you who found a way to realize it."

"It needed but a word!" she protested.

"Please tell me about it," said the baron, who had watched this altercation with a smile.

"It was like this," Rénee explained. "It is true that at one moment this imbecile was so stupid as to think his career ended. He permitted himself to become discouraged because he could not, all at once, persuade his country to think as he did—to make it think, as he calls it, internationally."

"That is something no country does," observed the baron. "Perhaps it will come some day, but I am not at all hopeful. The better we know other peoples the less we seem to like them. But go on."

"It was M. Scott—a friend—who proposed the idea of an organ—a journal, you understand, hebdomadaire—where he could gather together a band of fanatics like himself and keep on fighting for his beliefs. The idea appealed to him—he began to think that, in control of such a journal, he might find life again worth living."

"So he doubted, did he, that life was worth living?" commented the baron. "Even when he had you? It is easy to see that he is an American!"

"Yes; Americans are like that. They have some-



thing, I know not what—an engine—a dynamo—inside them, driving them on. I doubt if they are ever really happy, as a Frenchman can be happy—entirely happy and content. At least, not for long; they feel they must be doing something.”

The baron nodded.

“You are right. What is M. Selden going to do?”

“He has his journal!” cried Rénee and clapped her hands.

“Yes,” laughed Selden, “she got it for me, much as she would buy a toy for a child, to keep it quiet.”

“But how?” asked the baron.

“Ah, it was simple,” Rénee explained. “The only difficulty, it seemed, was one of finance. You remember that young M. Davis?”

“Very well.”

“You knew, by the way, that he had married my niece, Mlle. Fayard?”

“But certainly!” laughed the baron. “That was another of my defeats. The Princess Anna is still a spinster—though she also has become a bride—but of the church. M. Davis is happy, I trust?”

“Oh, yes; but he also is an American—though not so earnest a one as my husband here. Nevertheless he wished to find something to do—some way to employ his money—a way that would amuse him and not be too fatiguing. I had only to suggest the journal.”

“It is going to be rather wonderful,” said Selden, his eyes shining. “I have been in New York all summer making the arrangements; I was astonished at the enthusiasm; I shall have a splendid staff, and

perhaps we shall accomplish something yet! But before I started it, I came back for this lady."

"And now you are returning?"

"Yes—we sail to-morrow on the *Paris*."

"That is good," said the baron. "But come—let us drink to the journal—that it may accomplish all you hope for it! Yes," he went on after a moment, "I am glad you are going back—though that means that I shall, perhaps, not see you again, for I am growing old. But it is not well for an American to stay too long in Europe. It is difficult for me to explain just what I mean. It is like an apple," and he picked one up from the basket of fruit on the table. "One gathers one's crop of apples and one puts them away for the winter, and some of them keep very well. But others, after a time, begin to show little specks here and there. That does not hurt them—indeed, it improves their flavour—but they must be used at once. Otherwise, almost before one knows it, they grow rotten at the core and have to be thrown away.

"Americans are like that. They do not keep well in the atmosphere of Europe. It is good for them, yes, up to a certain point. They grow a little specked, perhaps, but their flavour is better, more rich, more satisfying. But beyond that—no. Forgive me," he added, carefully replacing the apple. "An old man likes to preach. Ah, here comes the surprise!"

M. Rizzi's surprise proved to be a soufflé piping hot with an ice in the middle.

"But tell us about yourself," said Selden. "What are you doing in Paris?"

"It is a long story," answered the baron musingly. "After the king's death—which, as you know, was very sudden—I felt as you had felt—though with much more reason—that I was finished, that there was nothing left for me to do but to creep away somewhere and die. Then Jeneski sent for me. He asked me to be his minister in place of one whom he had discovered to be a traitor to him. And I found that I still loved my country. We get along very well together."

"And his wife?" asked Rénee, her eyes shining.

"She has already become a sort of saint to her people; they adore her, and they have reason to, for there is no country in Europe which progresses as ours does. She is very happy."

"Have you ever heard from the Countess Rémond?" Selden asked.

"Not directly; but I believe she is in Budapest plotting to place Charles back on the throne. It seems she has a passion for restorations. That poor M. Halsey has been released, as perhaps you know. He was sent to a *maison de santé* for a time, but Jeneski refused to press the case."

They sat silent for a moment with full memories and tender hearts. Then the baron looked at his watch.

"It is good to be here," he said; "it renews my youth. But I must go. M. Rizzi," he added to the bowing restaurateur, "permit me to compliment you upon this little supper. I have never tasted better mayonnaise, and your surprise was exquisite. No—I shall not need a cab—I have but a step to go."

They passed together into the street.

"My hotel is just there," said the baron. "So I shall bid you good-bye." He looked at them for a moment pensively. "The French have a proverb," he added, "'To part is to die a little!' It is true, especially for the old. Write me sometimes."

"Oh, we shall!"

They watched him as he walked away—a gallant figure, defiant of the years. At the corner he turned and waved his hand. Then he was gone.

Selden raised his hat.

"I hope," he said softly, "that some day I shall meet another man like that!"

THE END







